























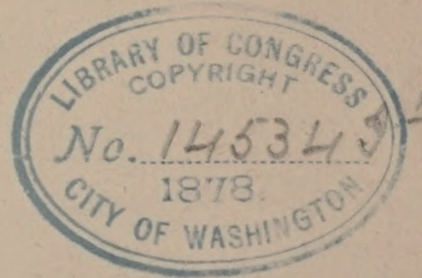


# OUR WEDDING GIFTS.

BY

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"FROM HAND TO MOUTH," ETC., ETC.



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# OUR WEDDING GIFTS.

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## CHAPTER I.

“A QUIET wedding,” I said, “and a pleasant little tour.”

“A *quiet* wedding!” and Elizabeth looked up reproachfully, continuing, with impressive dignity, “I believe, Adolphus, *I* am the proper party to decide about the wedding. I must say it would be very ungrateful to aunt, after all her kindness, to go off to church like any common person, and then your friends are excused from sending in wedding presents. Aunt has made so many, and has no daughter of her own to receive them in return! I must say it would be extremely short sighted, and unjust, and cruel,” her voice rising with every expletive, “to deprive me of the pleasure. If I can’t be married as I like, I won’t be married at all! There!” and Elizabeth dropped her face in her lace handkerchief.

“My dear,” I began, wonderingly.

“Wedding presents enough to set us up for life! Solid silver, and glass, and bronzes, and—and laces, and oh, I do hope there will be lots of things,” sobbed Elizabeth, “and you are very selfish and”—



I went around to my charmer, amazed at the violent storm I had innocently evoked, and strove to pacify her by promising that she should have everything just as she liked, and that I would be married—in one of the public parks, I was about to add—but she glanced up smilingly, and peace was restored.

“A wedding in church, with a regular crush reception. I shall ask everybody to the house that I consider good for any reasonable gift.”

I was a little bewildered by this, but replied, meekly, that she must know best, since my experience of fashionable society was limited.

“You dear Adolphus!” and she gave me a kiss. “You have such a good temper! I really must take lessons of you.”

I said my adieus presently, and walked down the street in a thoughtful mood. In a month I should be a Benedick.

As a veracious chronicler, I must confess that my engagement had been so great a surprise to myself that I could hardly think it an actual event. I was five-and-thirty; I had indulged in a few romantic dreams in the days of my youth and poverty; and later in life, when I began to get in easier circumstances, I settled to a pleasant ideal, to be compassed when I had made money enough to retire to a small farm. The shaded porch on which I should sit and smoke; the cosy library, where I would spend the winter evenings penning experiences



for some rural paper ; the gentle, meditative pony on whose back I should disport myself, and a vague, suggestive figure in white, mostly, with a blue ribbon about her fair neck, whose light step, soft touch, low voice, tender brown eyes, etc., etc.

I had met Miss Elizabeth Von Trump now and then in society, and she had kindly invited me to the grand Von Trump mansion. To be sure my position as junior partner in the old firm of Trask, Keep & Co. entitled me to rather more consideration than the situation of bookkeeper merely. But the Von Trumps were Fifth avenue people, and Miss Von Trump had been abroad, spent winters at Washington and summers at every known watering place. She became so extremely affable, insisting that I should accompany her aunt and herself to places of amusement when uncle Von Trump was in Albany or Washington on political business. This attention from a woman who had crowds of adorers at her feet, was undeniably flattering. She led me to talk confidentially of myself ; and one evening, when I had ventured to air a few of my ideas concerning love and marriage—the subject in hand—she suddenly raised her eyes in a very enchanting manner, and exclaimed in a tremulous voice, “ What a happy woman your wife will be, Mr. Stryker ! I could almost envy her ! ”

Were there actual tears in Miss Von Trump’s eyes ? Could it be possible that a woman of her varied experiences and opportunities could, or would, or did—



“ You are so different from the empty-headed fops of the day,” she murmured. “ A woman could trust you so implicitly, could rely upon your strength, and manliness, and honor ”— and her eyes drooped, her fair face flushed.

There was a ringing in my ears and a great surging of blood at my heart ; a queer, tingling sensation in every nerve. Her hand seemed to slide into mine.

“ Elizabeth,” I said, “ will you deign to become that woman ? I have so little to offer you ;” and I paused, frightened at my own temerity.

“ My dear Adolphus !” and the hand returned my pressure with delicate warmth as a happy sigh escaped her. “ How rejoiced aunt will be ! She has always admired you so much. She has many times warned me against marrying a man of the world, who thinks of nothing but himself, ‘ while such men as Mr. Stryker ’— yes, she has actually said it, Adolphus— ‘ understand the delicate art of rendering a woman supremely happy by their own noble forgetfulness of self.’ ”

I yielded to a mild attack of idiocy. What I said and did is of little moment.

“ You will see uncle at your earliest opportunity, Adolphus,” murmured Elizabeth, at parting. “ He has been so good to me, and he would feel hurt if we kept our regard a secret.”

I promised. Could it really be, I asked myself, in the privacy of my own room, that I was engaged to marry



Miss Von Trump? And what about the country cottage and the girl with the blue ribbon? Elizabeth would want to spend her winters in New York, and her eyes were a rather faded blue, but her voice was deliciously soft and her manners unexceptionable.

I was cordially received into the bosom of the Von Trump family. I gave Elizabeth a diamond ring, a rather expensive one, I thought; but I wanted it to be as handsome as one or two that she wore ordinarily. There was no need for a long engagement, she suggested, so our wedding day was appointed, and then had followed this discussion as to the manner of the ceremony.

I had an antipathy, unreasonable, I dare say, to showy weddings. A June morning, a pretty country church, a fair young girl in white, a fortnight in some out-of-the-way place, where one could be as foolish as one listed. This might do for the brown-eyed girl, but Miss Von Trump's position demanded something quite different.

But there would be the wedding gifts. This levying a tax on all your friends seemed to me more reprehensible than a minister's donation party, and merely a phase of fashionable begging; but when I reflected on the many presents Mrs. Von Trump had given, and the fact of her having no daughter, I could see that it would be but fair play to return some of them. Of the Von Trump sons, the eldest had married a pretty milliner girl, been disinherited, and gone to California, where the young couple were prospering in spite of the paternal maledic-



tion. The second son was in Europe—no great credit to his family, report said.

This matter of the wedding being settled, we discussed the tour.

“Just a little run over to Europe,” said Elizabeth, airily.

“To Europe! At this season of the year?” I exclaimed, aghast at the prospect.

“Why, Adolphus, as if that mattered! A steamship can be made as warm as a hotel,” was her decisive reply.

“I am afraid I should not be able to spare so much time,” I said, hesitatingly.

“Time!” and Elizabeth laughed lightly. “Ten days to go, ten to return, a week in London and another at Paris, for it is not the style to run all over. We can do it easily in four or five weeks.”

“But what can we see in that brief while?” I asked, with an earnestness I fondly hoped was impressive.

“See!” exclaimed Elizabeth. “Why, I have done it all and been bored to death! I don’t want to see anything, but just shop a little in Paris and order a Worth dress, and then we’ll hurry home. I have quite resolved upon it, and really, Adolphus, have you the heart to deny me?” and she began to look hysterical.

“My dear Elizabeth,” and a cold perspiration bathed my face, “I am afraid I cannot afford it. When you did me the honor to accept me, you know I told you, without any deception, that I was a poor man. I have



a little money saved up for an emergency, but there will be house furnishing, and I really think—”

I paused there. If Elizabeth had discarded me on the spot I should not have been surprised.

“Adolphus,” and my charmer rose to her fullest height, and she is not a petite woman, “Adolphus, you forget the wedding presents! They will more than make up to us the cost of the tour. And if it is necessary I will take *my own money* for the trip. Adolphus, I am willing to share it with you. It is not much, but heaven knows how cheerfully I shall spend it on this pleasure, for *both* of us;” and then Elizabeth dropped on the blue satin sofa, and gave way to her over-wrought feelings.

I comforted. I promised. Elizabeth kissed me and called me her darling, and said I was so good, so tender; that she knew she was impulsive, and that her nerves were so sensitive, but that she would learn strength and self-command from me, only her nature was so essentially feminine, and I must be patient. Thus the matter ended.

A tour through Europe had also been among my ideals. When I had made enough money to be comfortable, brown-eyes and I would go away quietly, not aiming at any style, but live in those clean, cheap, delightful lodgings that people do manage to find, taking a day’s journey here and there until we had surveyed the country about us, then moving on to fresh pastures.



But this scurrying along like a hail-storm, was distasteful to me.

The wedding was appointed for the middle of November. Cards were sent out, and I was amazed at the array of friends my dear Elizabeth presented. I had an old uncle and aunt at Kingsbridge, living on a small farm; another uncle at the West who had been Governor, Representative and railroad president, but my knowledge of him was gleaned chiefly from the papers; one cousin, living in New York, a good-hearted, sociable, plain fellow, who had the cosiest home and the nicest wife imaginable. His sister was married to a comfortable Long Island farmer, and I had spent several summer vacations there.

"Adolphus," said my betrothed, in a severely practical tone, "invite your friends to the house, who will be pretty sure to send in something. We can't have our rooms filled with those who come simply to stare or to eat, and *they* can be invited afterward. The presents are all to be on exhibition. I *do* think it makes people a little more careful."

I felt bewildered by this display of wisdom, and, to confess the truth, somewhat shocked at the business-like manner in which the gifts were to be received. I had a suspicion that people eyed me as a rather well-bred mendicant, who was bidding for their favors.

"Hillo!" said Ned Bromley, my cousin, running against me one day; "how are you, old chap? In for



a swell wedding, I hear. Any solid silver business about it?"

"Do you mean wedding presents?" I asked, with a scarlet face.

"Yes; Kitty wanted to know."

"Ned," I declared, vehemently, "if you send me a sixpence worth I'll never forgive you to my latest moment. I want one friend whom I can meet afterward with a clear conscience and unblushing face. Give my love to Kitty and tell her that same."

"Sensible fellow. But you have stepped so far in among the aristocracy that you'll have to give us the go-by, I'm afraid. Hosts of good wishes for your happiness."

We shook hands warmly as we parted.

The evening before the ceremony I found my charmer in a most delightful frame of mind, and, I must add, that when Elizabeth was sweet she was simply irresistible.

"Come up stairs," she said, waving her jeweled hand with a most imposing gesture.

I followed her up the broad stairway, where the steps were so thickly padded it was like walking on velvet. The ordinary sitting room had been transformed into what looked like a fancy bazaar. Long counters ran across the room, displaying every imaginable article. I felt sure I did not know the name of half of them. Silver and gold, and bronze, and *verde-antique*, glass and china, and ivory and pearl, ribbons and laces, and gloves



and handkerchiefs in boxes and cases, scent bottles and vases, brackets and bags, fans, slippers; and outside, chairs and jardinieres, and cuspadores and great ugly Chinese jars and Japanese tables; articles to stand around, to hang up, to lie down, to tumble over, and for which there never could be found any use in this created world.

"There!" exclaimed Elizabeth, triumphantly "THERE!" in very large capitals. "My dear Adolphus, did I not tell you that I knew best. We do not expect business men to be able to manage all the intricacies of a fashionable wedding. Look at this silver service, solid too! Uncle managed that for me. And of spoons and forks there really is no end. We shall never have to give ourselves an anxious thought as to table appointments. Just think what is saved in house furnishing!"

"But we never shall need all those casters," I said, "and as for salt-cellars, they are as plenty as slippers at a minister's donation party. Really, my dear, I feel as if I ought to belong to the cloth."

"Adolphus, how can you attempt such a wretched joke," returned my betrothed in a severe tone. "Only the two handsomest casters are marked, and the others we can exchange. You can remark upon such a trifle, while these lovely verde-antiques and bronzes confront you reproachfully. Adolphus, have you any soul?"

I shrank back into my inmost self as I met her upbraiding eyes.



"And now," opening another door, "here is my present from dear uncle and aunt. I can hardly expect you to appreciate it, but—but—" and there was an ominous tremble in her voice.

"My dear," I returned, meekly, "it is the magnitude of these wedding gifts that overwhelms me—destroys my mental equilibrium for a moment or two. I begin to realize what an immense favorite of fortune you must have been, and wonder how I dared aspire to your hand."

"Adolphus, my darling, when you do talk sense you are charming."

We turned to view uncle Von Trump's gift. A bedroom suite fit for a prince at the very least. The bedstead looked large enough for an ordinary chapel. The head was carved, and gilded, and inlaid, indeed, it would have taken a week to study out the intricate designs. It went up to the ceiling and down to the floor, and I felt that it would be sacrilege to venture to sleep upon it. The bureau was equally magnificent. The chairs were upholstered in violet satin, and the bed was covered with lace spread over the same color.

"That is *my* taste," announced Elizabeth. "Blue and scarlet, and rose, have been used so much, and it is not every complexion that can stand violet. Isn't it the perfection of loveliness! And the spread and shams are real lace over satin. Kate McCready's were only thin sleazy silk. And look at this lovely sleepy-hollow chair. That is from Mr. Brisbie. Poor fellow! he really was



hard hit by the news of my engagement. And this elegant dessert service is from Captain Brown. I sent them cards—they *are* rather second-rate people, but since they are so anxious to get into society, why should they not pay for it? I wouldn't have expected such taste from the odious manner in which Mrs. Brown dresses. And look at this beautiful crystal—every kind of wine and champagne complete. I was in Collins & Black's one day, and saw this set, and went wild over it. 'I do hope,' I said, 'that some one will have sense enough to send me that for a bridal gift,' and here it is."

My face flushed somewhat at this naive confession. Was it the custom of brides elect to go around announcing to their friends what they would like to receive?

Elizabeth was suddenly summoned down stairs, and I continued my survey. What puzzled me was, where we were to put all these things. Whatever were all these curious forks and knives, and paddles, and ladles to be used for, and certainly we should have to stand our mantel-pieces thick with vases. Then I fell into a reverie. If, now, Elizabeth had opened a subscription book, and every friend had put down the amount expended for these articles, we might have bought a pretty cottage somewhere in the suburbs, perhaps, and furnished it to our liking. We should not be able to give tremendous parties, nor even dinners, and certainly two people could never use half of these things. To be sure they had not cost us anything, and I hated to seem un-



grateful, but I could understand how much Christian grace it took to render a clergyman thankful for twenty-five pairs of slippers and four bushels of biscuits the day after a donation party.

However, Elizabeth and I exchanged a cordial good-night after many charges concerning the morrow. I retired to my bachelor quarters for the last time, lighted my cigar, looked over some old letters, and destroyed them, though I had no holocaust to make of curls of hair, faded ribbons, or perfumed gloves. Then I resigned myself to sleep with a clear conscience, and was not even haunted by an avalanche of wedding gifts.

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## CHAPTER II.

THE marriage was one of the affairs of the season, and was graphically reported in the daily papers. Elizabeth cut out the articles and keeps them in a secret drawer of her jewel-case. I have a vague remembrance of walking in church, with a cloud of whiteness on my arm. I believe I responded rightly, though cold shivers chased each other down my back. There was no awkward *contretemps* with the wedding ring. Amid a crash of music we sailed majestically down the aisle, and were whisked off to the Von Trump mansion, where, for three mortal



hours, we endured the agonies of a crush reception. I bowed until my neck seemed dislocated; I said idiotic things; I smiled until I feared I was coming to resemble a laughing hyena. Through it all Elizabeth was superb. I was struck with a still deeper admiration for a woman who could remain so self-possessed, so tranquil, and show no traces of fatigue.

The procession went up stairs to view the gifts, and down stairs for refreshments. There was a buzz of remarks, and shrieks of admiration. The jealousy, envy, and heart-burning, who can tell?

"Be sure and send all my solid silver to the bank," were Elizabeth's parting words. "Send for a man to come and pack the glass and china, and we shall surely be back in time to receive New Year calls. Good-bye, dear, dear aunt," and the two women cried a little in each other's arms.

An hour after we were outside of Sandy Hook I was sea-sick. The passage was rough and uncomfortable, though not stormy. A merchant friend of Elizabeth's was going over, so she had some company, for I did not begin to crawl about until we were almost in port. Then the hurrying about London in a fog, the whirl and excitement, crossing the channel, and finding myself in a new hubbub, rendered me really ill. It was fortunate that Elizabeth could find her way about alone, since I was so wretched.

We were gone just six weeks and two days, at a cost



of twelve hundred dollars. It made quite a havoc in the sum I had laid by towards my farm.

However, I was devoutly thankful to find myself once more in the sumptuous Von Trump mansion. Even Elizabeth, I thought, looked a little jaded, but I had learned that the rose and pearl of her complexion could bloom serenely enough in spite of fatigues, or headaches, or dissipation of any sort. It must be a great comfort to a woman to possess this grand secret of unfailing good looks, and have everybody say—"Ah, no need to ask how your tour agreed with *you*."

Ned Bromley came in the office one morning, and started as he saw me. I was thin and sallow, I knew.

"You look as if you'd had rough weather, old fellow," said he. "Whatever did possess you to cross the ocean at this season of the year? Did Paris and London meet your expectations?"

I confessed ruefully, that as a sight-seeing tour, it had been a dismal failure.

Elizabeth wore her new Worth dress on New Year's day, and was resplendent in a mass of silk, satin, velvet, lace and ribbon, that appeared to have been thrown together and adhered by some new law of attraction. It was a second edition of the wedding reception. In the evening I stole out and found my way to Ned's. They lived on a very convenient and comfortable floor, at a rent of six hundred dollars. Kitty did her own work, except the washing, and took care of her three children.



They meant, when they had saved up a sufficient sum, to purchase a pretty suburban house, with fruit and garden.

How cosy they looked in their simple parlor. Kitty always gave such a pretty air to everything. She had a way of manufacturing home adornments at a slight cost that were quite marvellous. She had papered her dining-room with a sort of panelling, and put a fresco bordering at the top, making it look equal to the work of a paper hanger. She upholstered chairs ; made mats and rugs and wall pockets ; painted vases and fruit and flower pieces in water colors. She always had some fancy work handy, and I used to love to watch her fairy fingers as they flew in and out of bright-colored wools. If Providence had bestowed upon Kitty a younger sister, Elizabeth Von Trump would never have met me in my bachelor estate.

There was a fire of blazing coal in the parlor grate that gave everything a warm glow. Kitty, in a brown silk, with plenty of soft lace about her neck, and a nose-gay of carnation pinks and heliotrope at her throat, looked every inch a lady. The piano stood open, and Ned's flute lay upon it. I am afraid you will think I am describing an ideal character, but Kitty actually had kept up with her music since her marriage, and taught her two eldest children.

Several friends dropped in, and we had some fine singing. Afterward, Dick Seaton, Ned and I went in the dining-room and had a smoke. Dick chaffed me a good



deal about my marriage. He heard we had enough solid silver to set us up for life. Would I not be afraid of thieves? Were there many duplicates? if so, I could keep them for future occasions when I had to return bridal presents. I would find them come in very handy.

The thought startled me. Why, it would take a fortune! Then I remembered Elizabeth had said these articles were sent in return for favors her aunt had bestowed, and concluded that Dick Seaton was not posted in such matters. It would be manifest injustice, I reasoned, in a cloud of cigar smoke. These gifts came from different individuals, but for one person to return the whole amount would be preposterous, ruinous!

It was quite late when I returned home, but I had taken only one glass of sherry wine, and was very clear-headed. The Von Trump drawing-room was still full—uncle Von Trump's political friends seemed to be holding a caucus. A throng of Elizabeth's olden admirers were about her, some of them, I must confess, rather thick in the tongue, and with a watery look about their eyes. Indeed, I felt very strongly inclined to order out two or three of them without further ceremony, but refrained, as it was not my house.

"Adolphus," said Elizabeth, a few days afterward, "I wish you would give me two or three hundred dollars. I told aunt she should not go to the whole expense of the New Year entertainment, as it was so much for us, and they were so generous at the wedding."



Various small items had been sent in to me, to the amount of five hundred dollars. My reserve fund was rapidly decreasing. However, there would be no more gorgeous festivities, so I made her out the desired check, having learned that when a woman mentions two sums, the first is merely complimentary, the second the amount desired.

We were quite worn out with balls and parties and dinners during the month. Indeed, some of them I did not attend. There was a wearying sameness, it appeared to me. Late hours, hot rooms and French cookery did not agree with me, I must confess. I used to look at Elizabeth in wonder as she and her aunt discussed appointments, and it seemed to me a life of pleasure was harder than any work.

“Laura McFadden was in to-day,” announced Elizabeth, one of the rare evenings when we were in the retirement of our boudoir—I am not quite sure that is the right word, for I do not understand French. Elizabeth, like a good wife, bridges over the slippery places for me, though why respectable English is not as good is a puzzle to me. Do French people, I wonder, interlard their conversation with scraps of English? “Laura was in—Adolphus, I don’t believe you are paying a bit of attention.”

“Yes, my dear;” rousing myself from my French reverie, and glancing at her diamond forefinger.

“One of the houses in the row where she lives is to



rent, and they are so elegant, so complete in every respect. They have rented for thirty-five hundred dollars, but this is offered for three thousand. Had we not better secure it at once, for those houses are snapped up eagerly? It is just the neighborhood I like, since we cannot live on the avenue."

I drew a long breath. The last and fatal moment had come, and the ringing in my ears was as loud as the beating of the drums must have sounded to the unfortunate Gilderoy. I cleared my throat. I studied the shaggy worsted dog's head on my slipper that made my foot look broad enough for a corn planter, but a friend of Elizabeth's had sent us each a pair. Elizabeth consigned hers to the chambermaid, declaring that she hated worked slippers, and I longed to bestow mine upon cook, but had not the courage. I braced my back-bone hard against the chair; I even thrust my hands in my trousers' pockets.

"Why don't you answer?" cried Elizabeth, impatiently, laying carefully in a drawer the beautiful finger puffs she had just taken from her head. Next it would be the massive braid, then a fringe of curls, and the little wisp at the back would be all that was left of her luxuriant hair. "I do believe you love to be provoking!"

"My love," I returned, mildly, "I was considering the most agreeable form of answer compatible with my circumstances. Elizabeth, my dear girl," and here I



straightened up—it always mollified her, I observed, to be called a girl—“I am afraid, in the fervor of your first love for me, you hardly understood that you were marrying a poor man. It is the sad truth, my love. I wish I were a millionaire for your sake. Yet I am afraid we shall not be able to pay a rent of three thousand on an income of five thousand.”

She paused before me with the dignity, the grandeur, the sadness of a Norma, with the braid of hair still in her hand. Would she go into a frenzy of passion, or a swoon of despair?

“You know I told you I could not begin my married life under a cloud of deception.”

“Five thousand *is* very little,” she remarked, sadly. “Adolphus, could you not speculate, or become a contractor like Timothy McFadden? I am sure you are as smart and much better educated. But Laura keeps a carriage and has everything.”

“I do not believe I have any head for speculating,” I returned, frankly; “and to be a contractor one must belong to a ring and give champagne suppers to crowds of men, and be hand-in-glove with pot-house politicians.”

“Adolphus, I do wish you would not express yourself so vulgarly, quite as if you had been brought up a—a shoemaker,” said my angel, sharply. “I am sure Laura goes in the first society——”

“But Tim McFadden’s father was a soap boiler, and you know you said at first, that family was more to you



than wealth, or I should not have dared to aspire to your hand. I am afraid, my dear, you hardly counted the cost. Will you not regret, long for your freedom, that you may choose more wisely ? ”

What visions floated through Elizabeth's brain at that moment I could not determine. She seemed lost in consideration.

“ What *are* we to do, Adolphus ? ”

“ People do live on five thousand a year. There is my cousin, Ned Bromley, who has but two thousand, and is saving up money—”

“ We *must* have two servants, and there ought to be a colored waiter with all that lovely glass and china that never cost us a penny. Why, I might as well not have had any wedding gifts as to have no house to put them in,” and Elizabeth began to sob in her handkerchief.

I endeavored to comfort her. I promised to devote my spare time to learning the mysteries of Wall street, and cultivating Tim McFadden, that after a year or two we might afford something. While I was in the firm of Trask, Keep & Co. perhaps it would be well not to make too great a show, as they were quiet, old-fashioned men, with some rather queer notions.

“ And I promised Laura to go, and, however can I tell her the mortifying truth ! Oh, Adolphus, not that I love you any less ”—and here Elizabeth wept hysterically—“ not that I would be single again, but if we only



*could* have a house equal to our wedding gifts, I should be the happiest of women."

I soothed and comforted with delusive hopes, I am afraid, and at last Elizabeth being divested of her high art adornments, was persuaded to retire. When I heard her breathing regularly, with a little whiff now and then, I felt she was sleeping the sleep of conscious rectitude. Knowing well that it was a husband's place to take the brunt and burthens of life, I lay awake a long while, puzzling myself as to how we ever would get a house to suit our wedding gifts. When at last I fell into a troubled slumber, I dreamed a silver elephant was stumbling around over jars and bronzes, and china, and that the floor was strewn with fragments, while I rushed into the street and shouted myself hoarse, trying to get some one to come and capture the elephant.

This was the beginning of many anxious discussions, much dividing and sub-dividing, until we finally agreed that our rent could not be more than two thousand dollars. Old Mr. Trask offered me a house adjoining his at eighteen hundred a year. It was a rather old-fashioned three story brick, but Elizabeth was so overcome at the sight of it, that I did not insist upon her going within.

We took a list from a house agent, and began our quest. It was singular how many miserable specimens of architecture and inconvenience we found. And where the closets and sleeping apartments were all right, the



parlor would be all wrong. At last I hit upon one I thought would suit.

Alas ! The hall was too narrow, and with no place for statuary. The dining-room was very plain, with an atrociously low ceiling, and there was no style about the parlor. No, it never would do. She could not live in a dungeon !

"Very well," I said, shortly ; "when you find a place that *does* suit, I will go and look at it. We are very busy now, and time is precious to me." With that I walked off, much relieved.

About the first of April Elizabeth announced she had found the desired prize—a row of twenty-five hundred dollar houses, which would be let for two thousand to a reliable tenant.

The exterior was really grand. A handsome vestibule ; a frescoed hall ; a superb parlor, with a wide cornice and elaborate centre piece ; black walnut, cherry and holly trimmings ; a wainscotted dining-room, with butler's pantry ; but the kitchen plumbing had an ominous look, and the walls were cracking in every direction.

Elizabeth ran up the long stairs delighted. The second floor was not quite so magnificent ; indeed, I thought it very common. It was awkwardly cut up, with a dark room in the middle, and all the chambers were small.

"Is not the ceiling low ?" I ventured to suggest.



“But the parlor is so *very* high,” said Elizabeth, with the consoling voice of a sister of charity.

“There is your bedroom suite. I am sure we could not get more than one piece in each room.”

“But the dining-room is so handsome. We cannot have everything.”

I felt that it was a cheap, showy sham, with every room sacrificed to the parlor. On our return home I measured the bedstead ; it would just crowd in.

I am happy to pay this tribute to Elizabeth’s good sense, that she allowed herself to be convinced, and that the next week we found a much better house, although the parlors consisted of two rooms with sliding doors, and were not as magnificent. But up stairs one room ran across the front of the house, was well lighted and cheerful. Elizabeth’s whole bedroom suite could be accommodated here.

And now what about furnishing and living ? I took out a pencil and account book to make an estimate.

“A cook and a chambermaid, one at twelve and the other at fifteen dollars a month, and their board—six or seven hundred—”

“And a colored boy to answer the door and wait upon the table. It gives such style to an establishment. And he could polish the silver, and look after your boots and shoes, my love,” said Elizabeth, with fond eagerness.

“A thousand, then, for servants. Two thousand for rent, and—can you live on two thousand ? ”



"I must try, dear Adolphus, though I know very little about managing a house. But I shall need next to nothing in the way of dress, and our furnishing will be a mere bagatelle. Nothing much but carpets and chairs."

Of my little hoard I had but twenty-eight hundred dollars remaining. I gave this to Elizabeth, explaining that it was all I had beside my yearly income from the business.

"But incomes always do increase?" and she looked up, questioningly.

"It will hardly do to trust too much to that hope," I returned, with a doubtful shake of my head.

Elizabeth was in her element for the next fortnight. Servants came and were catechised, carpets and furniture were inspected, workmen were flying in and out, a man came to pack up vases and statues and the most cumbersome of wedding gifts, and the bank was called upon to disgorge its treasures.

"You'll get a safe, of course," said uncle Von Trump. "And don't keep it in the basement. Have it upon the second floor under your own eye, and see that the servants bring up the solid ware as soon as it is used. Don't have things lying about to tempt stragglers. And keep your pistol under your pillow."

"Oh, goodness!" cried Elizabeth; "I never should sleep a wink."

I did not explain that I was not an adept at pistol



practice, and that even to have one in my hand gave me a shaky feeling.

About the middle of May, Elizabeth one morning invited me to dinner in our new home. With a feeling of elation, as became a householder, I walked proudly up the street, studied the number, and mounted the stone steps. Elizabeth was waiting to open the hall door. She was dressed in a light silk with a flowing train, had on her diamonds and her best hair, and was fragrant with hot-house flowers. She ushered me in with the graciousness of a queen.

"You may just peep into my parlors," she exclaimed. "Dinner will be at half-past six to-day, though I told Kate six would be our usual hour."

The carpets were soft to the foot and pleasing to the eye. Advancing a few steps, I stood in the utmost amazement. Could all this magnificence be mine? This confused mingling of blue satin, lace window draperies, rosewood and gilt, ormolu and buhl, vases and clocks, and pictures, and brackets and stands; and a solemn broken-armed Venus, in one corner, seeming to wink disreputably to an Apollo over yonder.

"Now I call that handsome, and in elegant taste. I brought Van Brickelbach, the artist, over here this morning, and he went wild, he positively did, and he is going to paint me a picture. It is ever so much handsomer than Laura's drawing-room; but poor Laura," and my wife let her voice fall pityingly, "does not possess an



atom of taste. Isn't it just perfect, Adolphus? Not too much, and no mixture of second and third-rate articles."

I picked my way about carefully in order to avoid a table or an easel, or a chair or a corner of a tête-à-tête, or a vase or a jar in some unsuspected spot. It made me think of an art museum, and I felt as if I wanted a catalogue.

"I suppose it is all right. I am not much of a judge," I appended, hesitatingly. "But why do you have that old blue and white plate there against the wall?" and I stared in surprise.

"That!" and Elizabeth's glance almost annihilated me. "That plate belonged to—let me see—one of the queens of Holland—or was it Belgium? Mrs. Hadderman sent it to me. It cost everything, almost, and she said she would not have broken her collection for another human being."

"My grandmother had quantities of just such plates," I made answer.

"But she was n't a queen! There is a glamor about anything royal hands have touched, and the value is not always with the article but the association and the great age. And now you might not think this old painting was so very valuable, but it is a genuine Holbein. Van Brickelbach went into ecstasies over it. But come up stairs."



I followed my guide, wondering what an ordinary plain man wanted of all this grandeur.

There was our sleeping-room, gorgeous enough for the Grand Duke. And here again we had a multiplicity of pitchers, and jugs and cups, some of them ugly and grotesque enough for Indian idols.

There was a passage-way between, and the back room was not so large, but very handsomely furnished, and this connected with the bath-room.

"This will be our room, as a general thing," remarked Elizabeth, "for I must use the other as a sitting-room, since we are so crowded. If the house only had been four stories!"

"But what is to be done with the next floor?" I inquired.

"Ah, come up and see," said Elizabeth, with a smile like a siren. "What would *you* say to a library?"

"A library! But I have so few books—"

"Nonsense! as if books counted! You want a place to smoke and to receive gentlemen friends, and as you are a business man it cannot be a study. Now do not be cross."

The carpet was a mossy green with flecks of crimson and brown, the furniture black walnut and maroon, a book-case, an elegant writing-desk, two or three luxurious arm-chairs, and a cosy lounge.

I should have been a brute not to have expressed my delight. Surely a wife who could order and arrange in



this fashion must prove a treasure to any man. I thanked my charmer again and again.

Just then the dinner-bell rang. We only had a moment to peep into the guest-chamber, done up in rose and pale green. The two small hall bedrooms must be devoted to the servants. It was too bad they could not have a floor to themselves, but in such a small house it could not be helped, and Elizabeth sighed.

I made myself ready, and we went down to the dining-room. A great buffet displayed our glass and silver-ware. The table was grand enough for a state dinner. I felt that we should have asked in some one to share our magnificence. Was all this state to be kept up for two people? Elizabeth was used to it, of course, but somehow I did not enjoy it. Once in a while was well enough, but could it be had for five thousand a year?

The young lad for waiter was to come to-morrow or next day to see about the situation. The worst was, he would have to go home every night, as there was no accommodation in the house. But Elizabeth meant to stipulate that he should remain when there was company, and be on hand early in the morning.

Elizabeth was in the best of spirits. Housekeeping would be delightful, and she was so anxious to have dear Laura see the house. After all, it was not so bad for a poor man.



## CHAPTER III.

I SLEPT soundly in my new house ; I went down town the next morning with a jubilant step. Spring business had been very fair, Elizabeth had expended my twenty-eight hundred dollars wisely, and there was no reason why I should not be a happy man.

“ Adolphus,” said Elizabeth, as I returned home that afternoon, “ Essie Wales’ wedding cards have come. Don’t you think it a good omen ? the first thing left at our new house. The wedding is to be at home, eight in the evening ; very old-fashioned, I think ; but we ought to go. And she is actually going to marry that little fool of a Munder. How can she, although his aunt is enormously rich, they say, and he will have it all. Essie<sup>is</sup> is so young and pretty though. And I’m not going to buy anything, but just have my wedding dress made over and trimmed with black lace. I have a lovely flounce, and there is that great roll Mrs. De Barsent me—Pusher to be sure, but then it matches the flounce. I wish it had been thread. And now what shall we give Essie for a wedding present ? ”

“ A—wedding present ? ” and I stared.

“ Why, yes. I would n’t be so mean as not to return the compliment. Mrs. Wales sent me that beautiful



bronze down stairs—Don Quixote and Sancho Panza. It did not cost less than a hundred dollars.”

“Are we expected to pay back the full value of all the articles we received?” I asked.

“How brusquely you express yourself, Adolphus. Some people who have sent us gifts will never marry, and some are married, and—oh, no we won’t have to pay half of them back, if you are anxious to know. But the Wales are very stylish people, and Mrs. Munder will keep her carriage, and *I* cannot afford to fall out of the ranks, if I have married a poor man. And now that I have such a pretty house—Adolphus, help me to think what would be nice!”

“How should I know? I have not had much experience in that line. I believe I once gave a bracelet and a few rings.”

“There is nothing actually new,” Elizabeth mused, “and Essie will not go to housekeeping. I dare say she has loads of jewelry.”

“Perhaps it would be better for you to go out and look,” I mildly suggested.

“I think I will, to-morrow. By the way, Adolphus, do you not think we ought to give a little dinner, or something? We ought not shut up our house, and it will soon be warm weather, with the real style going out of town. It ought not be later than the first of June.”

“I thought we had parties enough at your uncle’s. A man has his own house for the quiet and the com-



fort—" I paused, for a cloud began to shadow my charmer's face. Then a bright thought entered my mind. "Did your waiter come to-day, Elizabeth?"

"Oh, yes. But I am really afraid, my dear, he is such a handsome fellow, and very light, and hands like a girl—"

"Are you afraid of so much beauty?"

"It is n't that. Do not be ridiculous, Adolphus. But he would want ten dollars a week if he lodged out of the house, and aunt Von Trump does n't pay James but seven dollars a week with the care of the horses and all. I do think it is very high," said Elizabeth, plaintively.

I felt inclined to laugh. Ten dollars a week to open the hall door, wait upon the table, bring up a little coal, and sweep the sidewalk.

"We shall have to find a waiter with less beauty, I am afraid," I replied, soberly.

"Yet such appointments give a house tone and style," was the reply, in a regretful voice. "It may not make so much difference to *you*, Adolphus, but to a person of æsthetic tastes, harmony of surroundings is so desirable."

"But, suppose we never had any visitors, would you care so much then?"

"No visitors!" cried Elizabeth, aghast. "Adolphus, do you mean to keep me shut up as if I were in a convent?" and there was actual terror in the eyes of my charmer.

"My dear, I have neither time nor inclination to turn



jailer. The duties of junior partner at Trask, Keep & Co. offer a more alluring field. Then I may say with all truthfulness, that I am not of a jealous turn of mind. But you have not answered my question. If you were sure there would be no callers at the hall door, no guests at lunch or dinner, would you still desire to pay ten dollars a week to this olive-hued Adonis?"

"How perfectly absurd you are, Adolphus!" and Elizabeth looked at me as if I had suddenly developed a state of inoffensive idiocy. "If no one came, Lucy would do just as well for door opener and waiter. It is the style for *other* people to see!" and my wife raised her head triumphantly, as if she had fully entrenched herself behind a line of unassailable fortifications.

I stretched out my legs and crossed my feet, thrust my hands deeply into my pockets, and returned with remorseless cruelty, "Then your æsthetic tastes and love of harmony are simply for your neighbors. It seems that we are to spend our money with an eye single to the opinion of our neighbors, and not for the comfort and pleasure it may be to ourselves? Do you not see, Elizabeth?" I went on, warming with my subject.

"I see that you are floundering about in ridiculous nonsense, and your hands are up to your elbows in your pockets. It does make you such a figure, Adolphus, and slipping down to the middle of your back in a chair! You had much better be helping me think what I shall get for a bridal present."



I made various useful suggestions which my charmer scouted ; then I mildly insinuated that the masculine mind, being naturally more obtuse, could hardly be expected to discern the fine shades and discriminations necessary for wedding gifts.

Elizabeth spent the whole of the next day looking about. There were lovely neck chains and pendants, but Essie had loads of them ; there were bracelets ; there were rings ; there were laces and embroidery ; “ but,” said she, sagely, “ something to which you can put your name seems a much better investment. People always know then that *you* gave it, whereas laces and handkerchiefs go out of mind as soon as the presents have been exhibited—”

“ A caster for instance—”

“ To think that we had to exchange nine of ours at a sacrifice ! No,” heroically, “ I would n’t send a caster if there was nothing else to send ! There is a pretty Madonna at Schaus’, in a velvet case, for seventy-five dollars, and there are some other pictures—they always come in handy. Now, that is a bright idea, Adolphus ; I will get a picture.”

I supposed now it would be clear sailing in the household, but alas !

“ What *do* you think, Adolphus ? ” almost shrieked Elizabeth, a day or two after, as I entered the room. “ Such a—a swindle ! for you can’t call it by any other name. I never was so—yes, *sold* ! The shamefulness



of the circumstance justifies the use of slang, though in the higher circles it *is* reprehensible."

"My dear—" and my eyes opened widely.

"Hear me through, Adolphus. I observe you have a bad way of jumping at a conclusion before you understand half the facts of the case. You know you thought I had better have my white wedding silk made over for the reception, and I said I would use my black lace flounce and the lace Mrs. De Bar gave me ; so I sent Lucy with it to Otilde. To-day I went in.

"Does madame mean to use that imitation lace on her handsome dress,' inquired Otilde.

"Imitation lace! What are you thinking of, Otilde?' I said with severe dignity.

"Why this,' and she tossed it out contemptuously. 'It is a very excellent imitation, but I have worked so much in lace, that madame must allow me to be a judge. Of course, madame must have been deceived. I would exchange it?'

"Otilde,' said I, 'don't for a moment think that I bought imitation lace. That was sent to me by Mrs. De Bar as a wedding gift,' and if she could have heard the withering scorn in my voice, it would have crushed her, Adolphus! In the hurry of packing up—and then one is always in an excitement at such an important period of one's life as marriage—I did not examine the lace closely, and as I explained to Otilde, I could not have suspected Mrs. De Bar of such meanness! Twelve



yards of useless lace ! Oh, I *do* wish Mrs. De Bar had a daughter, and I could send it to *her* as a wedding gift."

"But Mrs. De Bar may have been mistaken," I suggested.

"She !" How lofty and annihilating the intonation was ! Elizabeth might have stood for Medea then. "*She* does n't wear imitation laces. Why, last summer she gave fifteen hundred dollars for her lace shawl at Stewart's. But she'll hear of it again ! I always thought there was something mean about Mrs. De Bar's face."

"But if *you* could n't tell the difference—"

"Oh, good gracious, Adolphus !" cried Elizabeth, as if a bee had suddenly stung her ; "you don't suppose *I* would wear imitation lace, and Otilde knowing all about it ! although it *is* an excellent imitation, and Pusher lace is so easily imitated. Why didn't she send me thread ?"

"Well," I said, jocosely, "you must pass it off somewhere else as a wedding present."

"Yes, I might," said Elizabeth, plaintively, "if there was any one—oh, Adolphus, there are those four Hendry girls. They gave me plated salt-cellars, and nut-picks, and dollar vases, and they would not mind ; in fact, it is doubtful if they could tell the difference. But I don't believe a soul of them ever will get married."

The dinner bell rang at this juncture.



I have thought since how very useful meals are in the grand system of wedded life. Few things could change the current of thought so completely. And if the roast happens to be overdone or underdone, or the steak broiled to a crisp, and the potatoes watery, it drives out of your mind such trifles as imitation lace, or even a marital disagreement.

Elizabeth bought the Madonna, and aunt Von Trump was obliging enough to come for us in her carriage. Elizabeth looked resplendent in her trailing white silk, half covered with black lace. There was a great jam at the Wales' mansion, which was lighted, and flowered, and adorned according to modern usage. Miss Essie was a pretty girl of twenty, while the bridegroom was a diminutive, washed-out, idiotic looking personage, whose conversational powers seemed to be limited to a drawling ya-a-s. There was a table full of refreshments in the dining-room, and the presents were on exhibition up stairs. There was a crush up and down, a general confusion of silk and lace, and ringlets and exclamations.

We went up of course to see how our gift looked among so many. There was silver, and jewelry, and vases, and traps of various kinds ; but oh, grief ! Elizabeth stood transfixed, and actually turned pale. Some one had sent in another Madonna in a purple velvet case, looking as much like ours as two peas in a pod. All delight in the festivities was at an end. Elizabeth



craned her neck over two or three women to read the name. Her own friend and admirer, Van Brickelbach! The perfumed air was as a waft of wormwood; the golden strawberries of May were as ashes in her mouth.

"It is too bad!" sobbed my angel, as she was taking off her gorgeous robes in the retirement of her chamber; "too bad! Of course she will keep Van Brickelbach's, and trade off *mine*, or sell it to some one at half price, or maybe give it away for a wedding gift. If you only *had* taken any interest in the matter, Adolphus, but you would make me go off alone, and you know you said you thought it as good a thing as I could buy."

"My dear," interrupting her, "what I said was, that I thought it very little for seventy-five dollars."

"You are no judge whatever of art, Adolphus," returned my wife severely. "It is exquisitely beautiful and fine; and when a man like Van Brickelbach selects such a gift, I take it as a great compliment paid to *my* taste. But I dare say, being in that business, he bought his for half-price—took it for a debt, may be, and of course Essie will display his everywhere, and there'll be nothing to show for *my* money. You are a plain and unpolished business man, Adolphus, but I'm thankful I am not married to such a lily-livered fool as that Munder."

"Thank you!" With that I tumbled into the lower floor of the four-story chapel bedstead, and left Elizabeth putting away her finery.

We had not yet settled upon our house warming when



the first of June came in, neither had we engaged our colored waiter. Friends had dropped in casually and staid to lunch or to dinner, and Elizabeth had been full of apologies for the unsettled state of affairs. Indeed, there had been much perplexity in getting our domestic machinery in harmonious working order. The plumber had to be called in, the dining-room carpet was discovered to be mismatched, and had to be taken up; Kate and Lucy quarrelled, and Kate packed up her limited wardrobe, but was finally pacified by my wife. Then one morning our safe key would not work according to the cabalistic sign, and one night our silver was not brought up, though as we did not know it until morning, we slept soundly.

"Adolphus, here are some bills that came in to day," and Elizabeth tossed them over into my lap.

"Bills? For what?"

"Why, you did not expect I *could* furnish a house from top to bottom on that paltry sum you gave me? I tried to be just as economical as possible. Aunt and I went all over, and our carpets *were* a bargain. Why, Laura's parlor carpet cost three thousand, and ours altogether have cost a trifle over twelve hundred. Aunt thought it very cheap."

"Well, then there was sixteen hundred left."

"Do you suppose any one *gave* us our furniture, Adolphus?"

"Why, no," and I quailed beneath my wife's eagle gaze.



“If I had married a clerk on a thousand a year—not that I ever could have done such a foolish thing,” and she poised her head superbly; “but under such circumstances I should have conformed to his style of living. But my husband being a partner in an old and respected firm—”

“A junior partner, Elizabeth, with an income of just five thousand a year.”

“In an old and respected firm,” she repeated with the utmost dignity, “and such a position demands a certain style. I tried to do my best and to be a happy wife,” and her voice quivered ominously.

“Get all the bills,” I said, with a husband’s authority.

Elizabeth, angel that she is, rose meekly, and after much hunting about bureau drawers, writing desks, closets, wall pockets, shelves and reticules, produced sundry folded slips of paper directed to “Adolphus Stryker, Esq.”

“I do not suppose they have all come,” said she, rather timidly.

“It would be well for us to keep an account book of furnishing and incidentals that are not strictly house-keeping,” I remarked in a business-like manner. “I will bring one home to-morrow. Meanwhile I will make a list of these.”

The carpet bill was receipted; another for kitchen furnishing, but it seemed to me there was an unnecessary



list of china and glass for people who had been so weighted with bridal presents.

"Elizabeth," I ventured, "do you not think three hundred dollars rather dear for a china dinner set? I thought we had one given to us?" and I glanced up questioningly.

"It was a tea set, and there was the Brown's elegant dessert service. Now, Adolphus, how could we disgrace such gifts as those by a common dinner set? I *could* have bought one, of course, much cheaper, say seventy-five dollars or so, but how would it look beside them? And I thought if we could only have a little, I wanted it good. I have not been used to cheap crockery."

There was something superb in the scorn with which she uttered this.

Two black walnut bedroom suites at one hundred and fifty a piece. I groaned.

"Now that you have begun, I expect you will go on and find fault with everything. But I don't see how I could have bought a lot of cheap, nasty, shabby stuff, when we had so many lovely things given to us. I should have been ashamed ever to have the donors come in and look me in the face, I really should, Adolphus! Aunt Von Trump thought I was very—very self-denying, and Laura did n't see hardly how I was to get along—"

"In such a small house, and with such a little furniture—"

"You are very cruel, Adolphus! You try to be satir-



ical, and what's the other word—oh, ironical ; but you are just cruel and cross, and narrow minded, and I'd rather pay for everything out of my own money than to have such a fuss ! ”

“ I am not aware that I have made much of a fuss as yet,” I said, grimly. “ I suppose a five hundred dollar buffet was bought to accommodate the elegant glass, and buhl tables to hold bronzes, and easels to hold pictures, and—”

“ Oh, do go on, Adolphus ! It looks so generous and manly for a man barely six months married to upbraid his wife when she has done her very best, and given up so many things, for there was such a love of a buffet for eight hundred, and I wanted it so, and Laura said—”

Here Elizabeth broke down and began to sob.

I must admit that I was vexed and troubled. I had a horror of debt ; more than all, I had planned to use all my income, and had no reserve fund. However was I to get all these debts paid ? For a moment I wished the wedding gifts in limbo. Why, I had heard of people whose whole house-furnishing had not exceeded a thousand dollars, but then they had not married a Von Trump niece.

“ Do you know of anything more ? ” I asked at length. “ What bills are still to come in ? ”

A quivering sob was my only answer.

Now, thought I to myself, I must be firm, even at the risk of being considered unfeeling. Elizabeth must be



made to understand what marrying a poor man really means. Why, a year ago I did not call myself poor, and thought five thousand quite a princely income. Kitty Bromley would have lived like a little queen on that sum.

“Elizabeth!”

My wife gave a sudden start, uttered a strange, tragical cry, just as I had heard an actress at a moment of pathos, and dropped on the floor at my feet.

“Elizabeth!” and my own voice began to falter. “My dear—” with sudden gentleness.

Had she fainted? What did people do under such circumstances? I tried to raise her; but her hands fell limp at her side. Smelling salts—had we any in the house? What was it, anyhow? Cologne—there was something in some bottle, somewhere! I danced around and snatched up the first thing that came to hand, and poured it over her. It was some kind of thick, pinkish-white liquid. Then I reached out for another bottle, missed my aim, and that went crashing to the floor. Elizabeth could not be allowed to die here alone, and then I bethought myself that it might have an ugly look. I rushed to the hall and shrieked, “Lucy! Lucy! Kate!” rushed back again, clasped the senseless form of my wife in my arms, and would have covered her face with repentant kisses, but the stuff I had poured over her was sticky and had a queer taste as it touched my lips. I did not dare lay her on the elegant lace cover



of the bed, and there was no lounge or sofa in the apartment.

"Lucy ! Lucy !" I called again ; then I remembered the speaking tube.

Lucy came running up stairs.

"Mrs. Stryker has fainted," I said. "Do you know what to do, Lucy ? or shall I run for a doctor ? I am afraid—oh, you do not think her dead, do you ? I don't know much about fainting, never having had any sisters—"

Lucy brought a towel and wiped her face, then bathed it—where did she find the cologne so readily ?

"I wonder where there is any aromatic hartshorn ?" she asked.

I stood trembling in a cold chill. What if I *had* killed Elizabeth ? My breath came in great gasps.

"She is n't dead," exclaimed Lucy, reassuringly.

"Then I had better go for a doctor ; there is one just around the corner. But take that stuff off the bed and let me lay her there. It seems so heathenish to leave her here on the floor."

Lucy disrobed the bed, and I deposited my precious burthen on it. I kissed her cold brow, and my tears fell on her cheek. What a brute, what a fiend I had been !

Then I flew around to the next street. Doctor Ferris fortunately had just come in. I implored him to follow me. I dare say he thought me crazy.

Elizabeth had revived a little. She lay there with



her eyes half-closed, looking deathly pale, and taking no notice of any one.

The physician advanced, felt of her pulse, studied her languid face, and seemed to think intently.

“Had anything occurred to—to—a—disturb the tranquillity of her general demeanor?”

My face turned scarlet, I know. I felt myself a guilty, miserable wretch. If Elizabeth died—well, like Cain, I should become a fugitive and outcast.

“She was—well, perhaps a little excited, and—as she went to rise—she—she fell and fainted.”

I knew the doctor suspected me. Visions of a coroner’s inquest and a grand jury presentment, floated across my brain. I stood at the bar of justice, scoffed at and taunted by my fellow creatures, despised, contemned—

“A glass part full of water,” said Doctor Ferris.

Lucy placed it on the stand.

He dropped something into it, and gave her a teaspoonful. A slight shudder seemed to run over her, then she opened her eyes, but closed them again.

“She has very delicate, susceptible nerves, and I should say not a great amount of physical strength. Women, our American women especially”—and here the doctor gave a bland smile—“are proverbially fragile. An undue excitement, a little over exertion, and nature speedily avenges itself. It is only a temporary disorganization, but she must be kept extremely quiet, or there may be a recurrence of the fainting. Give her a spoonful of this



—say every thirty minutes until twelve, then once an hour or two, if she is not sleeping. I think that is all that will be necessary.” And the doctor bowed himself out with the suavity of a prince.

I was reprieved. Neither the bar of justice nor the mark of Cain awaited me.

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#### CHAPTER IV.

I STOOD leaning over the elaborately carved footboard of uncle Von Trump’s gift. The spikes and angles stuck into me and gave me a disagreeable sensation, but I knew it was nothing to the torture I ought to endure. That pale, patient, angelic face stabbed me more keenly than any sword could have done. I longed to fall on my knees and express my contrition, my anguish, at having cost her such suffering. Really, I suppose I had *not* understood Elizabeth’s fragility. I had believed her the incarnation of radiant and unbounded health from the manner in which she had gone through our wedding without a murmur of fatigue. I shivered even now with a remembrance of the nausea, the frightful headaches, the weak tottering knees, and the peculiar and distinctive twinge of pain in which every separate joint of my spine had indulged. And how heroically Elizabeth would go to a grand dinner, and from thence to Mrs. Somebody’s



ball, and dance nearly all night. I must admit that Elizabeth was a very elegant dancer—devotee of the Terpsichorean art, I should have said, as dancer has a very stagey sound. And the manner in which she had shopped from morning till night for my unworthy sake had led me astray. In fact, I had hardly thought of delicate nerves and sensitive temperaments, but now they were brought before me with awful solemnity.

“If you please, sir,” said Lucy in a low tone, “I think I had better get Mrs. Stryker in bed. She would feel more comfortable.”

There could be no doubt of that. I gathered up my litter of papers, and then turned for another look at my angel. What would be the proper thing to do—kiss her and ask her forgiveness before leaving her? What did the heroes of novels do in such cases?

Lucy stood watching me with a peculiar expression. I noticed now for the first time what a trim figure she possessed, and how healthily the pink and white in her complexion was blended, without the assistance of velvet creams. Her blue eyes were clear and merry, and even now had a little twinkle in them.

“Lucy,” I asked hesitatingly, “have you had any experience in—in illness? Did you ever see any one so much like—like death?” and I shivered in every nerve.

“Oh, yes, I’ve seen people faint,” returned Lucy. “The room was very close and warm I think. She will be better to-morrow; I’ll call you if she desires it.”



Taking that for a dismissal, I walked lightly out of the room. Whither should I go? There was my library up stairs, the very nook for a man to creep into and make a rigid examination of himself. Here, too, Elizabeth's taste and tenderness would upbraid me and make me feel the heinousness of my sin.

I lighted the gas and my cigar with the same match, for I felt a new era of economy must be instituted, and it might be that Elizabeth's fragile health would unfit her for such rough and onerous duties. I settled myself in one chair and placed my slippered feet carefully on another, and for a time resigned myself to the solace of my cigar.

Presently I roused my mind and went over the bills again. I found myself nearly two thousand dollars in debt. Was there anything else? I glanced carefully about my room. I thought of the chambers, of the dining-room. Oh, yes, there were shades and curtains. Would two hundred dollars cover it, I wondered. Where could I get any money? When we made up our yearly balances next January—but that was so far distant. To have tradesmen and shopkeepers sending in duns for seven months would be unendurable. To save it out of our allowance was impossible; indeed, after severe figuring I was in some doubt as to whether we could live on the moderate sum of two hundred and fifty dollars a month. And it seemed a misfortune that our wedding presents should have been so extensive and elaborate



Instead of expending next to nothing for furniture, as Elizabeth fancied in the exuberance of hope and glamor of bridal blindness, we had been actually compelled to extravagance in order to have a house fine enough for our gifts.

I may as well say here that I had undertaken to cultivate Timothy McFadden somewhat. We had gone in to a little supper, from which the ladies had retired after an hour or two, and the men were left to enjoy their wine and cigars. But brandy and Bourbon were sandwiched between, and the intellectual part I blush to think of even now. True, enormous jobs were talked of that could be easily pushed through the "senate" or the "board," and what I should have termed swindles were laughed over with great jollity. Tongues began to grow thick, and oaths frequent, and I was glad to leave the charmed circle before I had found out the great mystery of "How to do it."

Then a few days after, as I was riding up in the street car with old Mr. Trask, McFadden bolted in, looking rather blear-eyed and flushed. "H'lo!" he jerked out with a nod, and as the car gave a lurch he came down on the knee of the passenger next to me, a nice, elderly person, who immediately arose and signalled the conductor. McFadden, to my disgust, plumped into his seat.

"Been t' rousen good dinner," he announced confidentially, winking out of one drowsy-looking eye. "Bailey



—met 'm t' other night y' know," with another nod—"gon' ter E'rup'. Dinner at Delmonico's. No end ter champagne! Cap'tal chap, Bailley! Eye teeth cut—"

Another lurch nearly threw him into my lap, and gave us a sickening waft of something stronger than champagne. He recovered his balance, winked at me again and nodded in an insolent manner. My face was scarlet with shame. I made a vow then and there to cease in my endeavors to cultivate Tim McFadden.

For several blocks we listened to his maudlin rambling, until mortified beyond endurance I stopped the car and sprang out.

"Do you know much about that fellow, McFadden?" asked my senior partner the next morning.

"I have met him a number of times this winter," I answered carelessly.

"Ah—your wife's uncle has some political affiliations, has he not? And this McFadden is in one of the worst gangs that ever cursed our city. Adolphus, you are young, but if you will take an old man's advice, you will keep clear of all such associations. They are regular gamblers. They decoy honest people into their traps, rob them of their reputation and their money, and kick them out when they are done with them. An honest man gains nothing by entering a den of thieves."

"I do not think I have any head for politics," I returned, "and such men are simply disgusting;" which I felt was the truth.



"They are never any credit to a business man."

True, the next time I saw Tim he was comparatively sober and quite gentlemanly. But I had an internal conviction that the devious ways of politics were beyond my comprehension. There was no chance of my making a fortune in that line. What then was to be done?

Lucy came up and tapped at the door.

"Mrs. Stryker would like to see you," she announced. "She seems a little revived."

I rushed to the window to air the cigar smoke out of my clothes. How unfeeling I had been to indulge in cigars when my darling lay half unconscious! I was amazed at the depth of depravity in the masculine soul, and resolved to don my dressing gown so that it might be less apparent to the keen sense of justice.

I entered the room timidly. "Adolphus," said my wife in a weak, faint voice.

"My precious darling," I responded, and bent over to kiss her hand that lay so lily pale outside the blanket.

"Sit down here beside me, love. No, don't speak. I can hardly bear the sound of a voice yet. It was very weak, I know, but I do not possess nerves of iron. Did I frighten you *very* much? I am so sorry, Adolphus!"

I clasped her hand in a transport of tenderness. That she should be so noble and forgiving, when I—

"My darling," I stammered. In what words of penitence could I clothe my passionate regret?



She raised her hand to entreat silence, and gave a long, quivering sigh.

"I know you *do* love me, Adolphus," she said, magnanimously. "Let us forget the momentary trouble. Sit here by me, dear, only remember that I cannot be excited. My nerves are so sensitive."

I held her hand in mine. She closed her eyes, and the deathliness of her appearance shocked me. I turned my eyes away at length to the dim gas light that threw shadows about the room, and gave the great carved bureau top a grotesque appearance. The city clocks were striking ten.

I sat there until I began to feel cramped and tired. The street grew very still. If I had dared to move—but Elizabeth appeared to be asleep, and I dreaded to disturb her. Eleven. She roused a trifle.

"Adolphus, could you give me my medicine?" she sighed faintly.

I am afraid I did it rather awkwardly. However, she repaid me with a sweet smile.

I wound my watch, I gave a little cough and sauntered to the window.

"Adolphus, I wonder if it *would* be asking too much to have you watch an hour or two? I can hardly think that I will have another nervous spasm; but I might. I ought to have the medicine regularly. You could call Lucy—"

I scouted the idea. I should only be too happy to



watch my darling. I picked out the easiest chair, and if I could have indulged in a cigar! but that of course was impossible.

Candor compels me to state that I became very sleepy. I even think I indulged in some surreptitious naps. It would never do for me to lie down; I should forget the hours.

"Adolphus," said Elizabeth some time after midnight, "I am quite certain I heard a noise at the basement windows. Will you not go down and see?"

"The silver has been brought up here," I said.

"But, my dear, I am so doubly sensitive to-night. The carpets, you know, could be destroyed, and my beautiful glass carried away. And those bronzes and the Majolica—do Adolphus—" and her voice became tremulous.

I started up.

"Take your pistol, dear. And look if everything is safe in the parlor. Oh, there is the noise again!"

I heard nothing; but my heart began to beat. How should I encounter two or three burglars! I groped down the stairs and lighted the hall burner, flaring it up suddenly. No masked face or brawny figure met my gaze. I peered cautiously down the basement way and listened. Not even the nibbling of a mouse. That gave me courage, and I pressed onward to the fray. The doors and windows were securely barred. The kitchen table contained the remnants of a feast, and I surely de-



tected wine in the glasses. I was unromantically hungry, and helped myself to a cream biscuit and some cold tongue.

"Oh," sighed Elizabeth in a distressed tone as I returned; "I was sure you had been killed, Adolphus. How many were there?" and her eyes were wild with a feverish light.

"There was no one, my dear. Compose yourself. Everything was perfectly safe."

She was in such a tremor that it took me sometime to quiet her. Towards morning we both went soundly asleep; but I woke with a headache and a cramp in my back. I breakfasted alone. Kate was regaling Lucy with some story in the back kitchen.

"It got to be just dreadful, that it did! Every few nights he a bein' called up and goin' for the doctor at dead of night, and she a kickin' and screechin' and screamin', and the doctor, a young good lookin' man, a pettin' and soothin' and callin' of it spasms. And one night the young doctor bein' away, old doctor Green come in 'nd just gev her a look. "'Stericks,' says he, "'stericks! Throw a little cold water onto her and leave her alone to scream it out.' With that he turned on his heel, and a madder women you never saw."

Could it be possible that some men had such wives? I asked myself. Then I thought of my patient and angelic Elizabeth.

She asked me to stop on my way down and leave a



message for aunt Von Trump, and to her dear Laura as well. She kissed me affectionately, and hoped she would feel strong enough to get up presently.

Where could I raise any money? Mr. Trask was very particular about young men beginning life within their income. He had already given me much good advice. I cudgelled my brains; I wrote a note to Ned Bromley, then tore it up. I went home without having settled upon anything. Elizabeth had been up in Central Park all the afternoon, driving with Laura McFadden, and was now very tired and languid and sweet, and had her dinner sent up stairs.

Van Brickelbach came to call in the evening.

"I must make an effort and go down," said Elizabeth, faintly. "Van is going to the Adirondacks and I would not miss seeing him this last time, surely. I will only keep him a few moments."

I knew this was a gentle hint that I need not leave the comfort of my dressing gown and slippers. I may as well confess that I retired to my library and solaced myself with a cigar, still wondering where I could raise money to pay these dreaded bills.

Fortune favored me in a small amount. Ned Bromley kindly loaned me a thousand. But the bill for curtains, cornices, lambrequins and shades came in—eleven hundred and fifty-two dollars. I thrust it in my desk and said nothing to Elizabeth.

She informed me a few days after that she did not



consider it worth while to do anything about a waiter boy at present, as everybody would be going out of the city soon. We had two or three little entertainments that were very stylish. Ned's sister, Mrs. Walton, came up for a few days, and I proposed they should be asked to a quiet dinner. Elizabeth acceded most graciously.

I came home early that afternoon. I wondered just a trifle if they would be overwhelmed by our grandeur. I hoped especially that my plain, honest, good-hearted cousin Carrie Walton would be dressed in a manner that would not offend Elizabeth's ideas. Kitty always looked well.

However, I need not have distressed myself. Mrs. Walton, in her brown silk and soft lace ruff, looked every inch a lady. Kitty was bright, vivacious and delightful. Mrs. Walton had brought her daughter, a pretty, laughing, chestnut-haired young damsel of fourteen, who was quite irrepressible.

"Oh, what a funny old jar!" she cried. "And see here, mother, there are some dishes just like old Mammy Green's! Why *do* you keep them in the parlor, cousin? And what an odd pitcher with a broken spout! Oh, cousin, what are these queer faces—"

"That is some rare Repoussé," explained Elizabeth, kindly; "and that, my dear, is a Palissy, a genuine specimen. And that is a Pompeiian vase. That is considered one of the most beautiful of antique jars, and that is a specimen of Cloisonné enamel."



Dora looked at them with wondering eyes.

"They are very valuable indeed," my wife continued, with immense satisfaction.

"Do you think they are really pretty?" asked honest Dora. "Now, this is beautiful," and she pointed to an exquisite china cup.

"That was painted for Marie Antoinette; but, my child, it is not half the value of many other things, for it is not half so old."

"But I don't suppose in real old times people made everything pretty, or did their work well any more than we do now, and no doubt there were people deficient in taste and the true idea of beauty, and they made ugly things which have been handed down along with the pretty ones; and the funny point is now, that even we can't decide the question because it is the fashion to worship old things," and the young iconoclast glanced fearlessly up in the face of my august Elizabeth, who seemed to study her as if she were a new and unusual specimen.

"They were among my wedding gifts," was the lofty but gracious reply. "Rare and unusual articles are generally more highly esteemed."

"Oh!" said Dora with a sagacious nod, and then she seemed to fall into a brown study.

Ned came in to dinner, and in his off-hand, sociable way, dispelled the remaining stiffness. I had not enjoyed a company dinner so much since I had been a householder. Our elegant silver, china and glass were



out, though we did not have wine. I had also suggested to Elizabeth the propriety of not keeping the decanters on the sideboard filled, unless special occasions required it.

"I hope we shall see you down to Longport this summer, as usual, Adolphus," said Mrs. Walton, with her cordial smile. "I think Mrs. Stryker would find a good deal to interest her, especially when the hotels are filled. We are quite gay, I assure you," turning to Elizabeth; "and Dora has just come in possession of a pony, which will prove a great source of entertainment, doubtless. We should be very glad to see you both."

My wife promised courteously. Ned laughingly invited us to come up and take a cup of tea and a little bread and butter with them, and so we bowed our guests out. I felt quite elated. My relatives compared very favorably in point of good behavior with my wife's friends.

"And this reminds me, Adolphus," said she, as we were pursuing our way leisurely up stairs, "we have made no plans yet for the summer. Where are we to go?"

"Go?" I repeated in surprise.

"Yes. Do you know it is actually the middle of June? Two weeks later there will not be a soul in the city."

"Really! I never remember New York in that deplorably depopulated condition."

"How provoking you are, Adolphus. You know what



I mean—no one really worth seeing. Uncle Von Trump has taken a cottage at Long Branch. Laura is going down for a few weeks, and then to the Saratoga races, and everywhere, and the Thompsons have bought at Newport. I don't care much for Newport ; it is grown to be rather a poky place, unless you can own your own cottage and your four-in-hand. But we must go somewhere."

"I shall be very busy," I replied. "Keep is travelling and Mr. Trask always goes to Cayuga Lake for six weeks. Then I take the last two weeks of August."

"It is a shame you should work so hard," cried Elizabeth, indignantly.

"I do not know that I work any harder than Keep," I replied ; "but more is expected of a junior partner, and then I was away in the winter."

"Adolphus, you don't mean to keep me in the city all through the hot, unhealthy summer, do you ?" and Elizabeth turned her tearful eyes full upon me. "I never have been used to it. I do not know how I could stand it."

"You might go with your aunt," I suggested, rather hesitatingly.

"Yes, I *might*. Aunt Von Trump has been generous enough to invite me for a month. The cottage is not large, and uncle Von Trump must entertain some of his political friends. And I do think, Adolphus, it is a very painful and mortifying thing to have to go and live



on your friends, when you are married," and Elizabeth wiped away some tears.

"My dear, I should be sorry to have you. Circumstances have cramped me somewhat," I went on cautiously. "There are certain bills I must pay as soon as possible. Another summer I may be easier in money matters ; but just now—and the last of August we will go down to Longport."

"Very well, Adolphus. I must resign myself to my fate," with a pathetic sigh.

"The inevitable and inexorable necessity, having married a poor man. Oh, my darling, will you not some day regret it?"

Elizabeth leaned back in her chair and sighed again, with her eyes half closed, and her lips quivering.

"No, Adolphus," said she bravely. "I may regret the poverty, the many straits and mortifications ; but I shall never repent having married *you*."

The man whom such a confession would not have transported to the seventh heaven, is a base, unfeeling wretch, and does not deserve to live.

As the weather became warmer I remarked that Elizabeth grew languid and pale, and I began to consider whether it *would* do to keep her in the city. Indeed, one night she was seized with faintness, and Lucy and I had our hands full until morning, when I dispatched the girl for the regular family physician, who had known all about her from a child.



That very day Spinning & Co. sent their collector down to the office. I was so thankful that Trask happened to be out. "If I could not pay it all, could I oblige them with part? They were sorry to ask it, but they had large bills falling due July 1st."

The hot blood rushed to my face. I had never been actually dunned before. And where was I to raise eleven hundred and fifty dollars? Yet I surely could not run the risk of having the bill come in again when Trask might be present.

"Would a note for—say thirty days—be any accommodation?" I asked, desperately.

"Certainly," responded the man, obsequiously; "they would be very thankful to have it."

I wrote it out, and the man bowed a most polite adieu. There was still nine hundred to be provided for. We had spent more than our allowance in May, since seventy-five dollars for a bridal gift had come out of it. And when the bills for June came to be paid—

Then a bright thought entered my mind. What if I *should* send Elizabeth away for two months, dismiss the servants, and economize? I could live so cheaply; then, too, I could plan how I was to get out of this slough of debt.

I found Elizabeth still in bed on my return. I bent over and kissed her pale brow.

"I did not think I was so fragile, my dear," she said,



in a weak voice, and her smile was sweetly sad. It touched me to the heart.

"Elizabeth, I am convinced that you must have change of air," I began, seriously.

"Just what good old Dr. Dupuy said. I suppose I have over-exerted myself. I was so interested in the house-furnishing, and so anxious to get the best bargains that could be found. Then, too, housekeeping was quite a new thing to me, and I used to think I could endure so much."

"You will have to go without me, for I shall be very busy, and I think it would be better to shut up the house, or at least discharge the servants. I will come home every night to sleep and see that matters are safe, and get my meals down town."

"Dear Adolphus, how good you are to make such sacrifices for me. I think I *should* like to go to Long Branch. Laura is going down with her horses and carriage; the children and the nurse are to be sent to some farm house in a healthy locality, and she will be quite alone. She will have a suite of rooms, but I could have a connecting chamber and use her parlor, and my board would be but fifteen dollars a week. Then when she left I would spend a little time with aunt Von Trump, and *then* be ready to go Longport with you. Laura mentioned this plan before, but I was afraid it would not be practicable. Do you think it best to shut up the house?"

"There would be no use of keeping two girls two



months, that I see. The wages alone would be sixty dollars."

"Still, we might not be able to get them back, and Kate is such an excellent cook."

"But I could live so much cheaper at a restaurant. And then," as a thought occurred to me, "the house, you know, would be entirely at her mercy. She might give parties and invite in all her friends."

"How ridiculous! The silver must be packed and sent to the bank, and all the small articles of value put into the safe. And she is perfectly honest.

"Except where wine is concerned."

"Adolphus, you cannot buy all the virtues for sixteen dollars a month," said my wife, with the air of impartial justice balancing her scales. "And we *can* keep our wine out of her reach, only it *does* look queer to see empty decanters after there has been company. I dare say she will tell all that at her next place."

"It would be so much cheaper," I urged, "and I have a number of bills to pay through the course of the summer."

"You'll do just as you like; men always do," returned my angel, with an air of petulance, as she generously gave up the argument.

The next day she went out riding with Mrs. McFadden, and the matter was settled. Best of all, Lucy was to accompany them. Kate was in high dudgeon at thus finding herself homeless at so short a notice. "Indeed,



she would never come back to any one who had used her so meanly. Not but that she could get plenty of places"—doors were hospitably standing open for her by her own account. Her month was not ended until the 10th, but I was glad to pay her full wages and let her go on the 1st.

The tea set and some important pieces of silver were packed and sent to the bank. Then I filled the safe with what was left, and sundry valuable parlor ornaments. Elizabeth's trunks were duly locked and strapped and sent on their way. She had improved exceedingly during the last week, and when I bade her good-bye on the steamboat, I was really rejoiced to see her so fresh and blooming and brisk in all her movements. I was to be sure to come down now and then.

I returned to my solitary home, looked carefully around to see that all the doors were locked and windows barred, then retired to my library, where I smoked a cigar or two, and then looked over my accounts. The indebtedness was quite appalling. How could I have been so reckless, so perfectly wild! And how was I to get out of it with clear hands? It might be possible that at the end of the year there would be a small balance to divide—and how fervently I hoped, nay, I do believe I prayed. At all events I addressed myself seriously to the task, and economized to the utmost. I found a friend, of whom I borrowed fifteen hundred dollars for six months, took up my note and paid several



smaller bills, and found myself at the first of August still three hundred dollars behind.

"Courage," I said to myself. "When Elizabeth returns we will talk the matter over, and try our utmost to live in a different manner. She will see that it is not possible to go on at this rate."

I went nowhere except to Ned Bromley's. Now and then of an evening we would stroll up to Central Park, and sitting somewhere at our ease, Ned would plan out his country place; the cosy house; the garden and fruit; the pretty Alderney cow; the Leghorns, Cochins, Spanish and Houdans he was to keep, and, above all, the pony. At times I was almost filled with envy. There could be no such dreams for me.

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## CHAPTER V.

AFTER Mrs. McFadden left Long Branch, Elizabeth went to her aunt's. I had been down to spend one Sunday, and found it quite expensive, but now went on special invitation. It seemed to me that uncle Von Trump looked fatter and redder than ever, and strongly suggestive of apoplexy. Elizabeth was full of engagements, and having a splendid time. She had accepted an invitation to spend a fortnight with some people who



lived in a perfect palace up the Hudson and were going to have a regular crush, with a ball, and dinner, and private theatricals, and all manner of gaieties. She wanted some clothes and various articles, and had a list all made out for me to hunt up, and pack, and send by express. Mrs. McFadden had not wanted to take Lucy to Saratoga, but aunt Von Trump had been very glad to have her, and now my wife would take her up to Laurel Park, as she would need a maid, and Lucy was such a treasure. And, of course, she must have a little money.

Consequently my indebtedness did not decrease much through August. The second week in September Elizabeth and her maid returned, very much jaded, I thought, and quite too tired to make the visit to Longport. However, I had given it up, and was not disappointed.

"Adolphus," said my wife, the next morning, "will you stop at Mrs. Pratt's and tell her to send me a first-class cook without delay? We must get in working order as soon as possible, for I have invited some friends to spend two or three days next week. Lucy can manage a day or two, but I need her to help unpack and straighten out. We ought to have a good stout woman to do some cleaning. Aunt Von Trump has a colored man and his wife, only they do charge so," and Elizabeth bent her eyes upon me entreatingly.

"I am afraid we cannot afford them then," I answered, briefly, as I walked away.



I came home to find Elizabeth, not exactly in tears, but in that frame of mind which, if she had not been my wife, I should have called a towering passion.

"Adolphus, *are* you sure no one has been in the house during your absence? Were you *always* in through the evening? And was everything well locked up when you went to bed?"

"Why, what has happened?"

"Happened! I have had Lucy looking over the glass and china, and would you believe it? ever so many pieces of my dinner set have disappeared, and four of my elegant dessert plates, and wine glasses and goblets—"

"There were more valuable articles in the house, and much that would be more attractive to a thief," I answered. "Besides, I was very careful."

"But where can they have gone?"

"I had the patent lock put on the china closet, you know, and I have never opened it myself. They could not have been stolen while you were away. What would any one want of a few odd dishes. More than likely Kate broke them."

"Kate! You always were so prejudiced against that girl, for some strange reason."

"Why, no; I liked her very well, only I did not think I could afford to keep an expensive cook for myself. Was anything in the closet disturbed?"

"Lucy said it *looked* just as it did when they were packed, but *she* did not count. But, Adolphus, no girl



*could* break so much in two months ! Lucy thinks she was very careful."

"Then, depend upon it, she took them away."

"What would she want of such things ?"

"Maybe she gave them to some of her numerous cousins to ornament their houses."

"What a wretched joke, Adolphus ! And now they must be matched, and I'm sure I don't know how it will be done unless I have them painted to order. I dare say you never thought to stop at the bank ?"

"I did not imagine there was any hurry."

"But I want it at home," declared Elizabeth, imperiously. A stranger might have thought her *it*, meant the bank. I knew it referred to our bridal silver.

The next day Lucy found some pieces of the dessert service in an ash barrel in the cellar. That established my point.

Our new cook came, a stout, brawny Irish woman. She was good natured, could broil and roast to perfection, but was very heavy handed on the china.

"Sure thin, it's jist aigg shells thim cups air, an' if ye want me to stay ye must get the kind ye kin drop on the flure widout iver a bit iv a crack," announced Bridget.

But alas ! The very first Sunday evening Bridget was brought home by two cousins, so elevated in tone that in the course of the next hour we had to send for an officer and have her removed. She was succeeded by a very incompetent Ann, who in turn was supplanted by



a very tolerable Mary, who was a fair plain cook, but her cakes had the appearance of a bullet-like lightness, and her pies were of a leathery consistency.

However, Mrs. Marshall and her two daughters came. There was a round of teas and dinners and young men. Elizabeth was a charming hostess, and the ladies declared themselves delighted, and made us both promise to return the visit next summer.

"But I am so sorry Von Bricklebach was not in the city," sighed Elizabeth "He would have liked Anastasie Marshall so very much. I know he would have wanted to paint her. Just the fair, calm, impassive loveliness he adores, and just the kind of woman a man with an artistic soul should marry."

"That pretty young girl ! Why, you surely would n't marry her to that thin, old parchment-colored chap, who is as fussy and nervous as a—a—"

"Adolphus, you know nothing about art or artistic temperaments, and your remarks on such subjects are perfectly ridiculous. *Any* handsome young girl might well be proud of marrying such a man. Why, society worships him, and his verdict establishes a thing at once. I wish you knew as much as Van Bricklebach."

"My dear," I said with some maliciousness, I must confess, "I should be content if I knew enough to get out of debt."

Elizabeth curled her lip, gave a haughty turn to her queenly head, and amused herself the remainder of the



evening by soaring into the realms of high art, and dropping me disdainful crumbs.

"Two grand surprises!" she exclaimed on my return the next evening. "Another wedding gift!"

"Has some one just heard of your marriage?" I inquired, in a blandly ironical tone. "Who is this benighted individual?"

"*She* would not feel flattered by the reception of her gift. Really, Adolphus—" and Elizabeth indulged in a half smile.

"This young woman was no doubt thinking of her own wedding; indeed, it may be near at hand, and she sent the gift with malice prepense—"

"You have guessed so exactly, Adolphus."

"I shall put a placard on the house with this significant warning—'No presents received.' I shall—"

"You had better box this and send it back to the fair donor, and let her know at once how ungrateful a man's heart can become—"

"Under much and severe provocation," I interrupted. "Well, let us inspect this wonderful gift. Where have you hidden this treasure?"

Elizabeth went into the adjoining room and returned with a mysterious something covered with her handkerchief. But before she could deposit it in my lap it had uttered a funny, half-plaintive little mew and reared its head.

\ Now, I must confess that I am fond of cats. Some



cats may be treacherous, and thievish and sly, but I have known dogs and human beings with the same mysterious traits. I grant that they, the cats, seem born with an innate propensity to make night hideous, but a clean, soft, well-behaved cat, sitting before your fire and purring contentedly, gives you a cheerful feeling at once. If I had a grate fire I should want a cat to round out the picture.

“Who sent that?” I asked, laughingly, as a pretty Maltese kitten with a blue ribbon around its neck, dropped into my lap.

“Here is its letter of introduction.”

It was Dora Walton’s rather large, round hand, quite unlike the school-girl chirography of my day, and it began—“Dear Cousins Adolphus and Elizabeth.”

“It was directed in that manner,” explained my wife. “A very well dressed countryman brought it, and I was so amazed that I opened it at once. A nice, chatty letter it is, too.”

Dora had been deeply disappointed at our non-appearance through the summer. My heart smote me as I perused her tender, girlish upbraiding. I, at least, might have gone down for a few days, but I had been so full of perplexity, so little in any mood of enjoyment. After her visit and her inspection of our numerous bridal presents, she had wanted so much to send us a gift, but her mother had laughed at her, and said we would not care for anything she could afford to buy. “And you



had so many tidies and mats and everything I knew how to make, but then I remembered you didn't have any kitty, and a real, true Maltese is quite a rarity, for the kittens are very delicate and hard to raise, but this is a real beauty. I hope cousin Elizabeth is fond of cats. I know you are, and so I send it with my very best love, although it is so long since your wedding. I remember your house with a great deal of pleasure; it is like a handsome palace or a museum, and what lots of friends you must have had to send you so much."

I glanced up at Elizabeth. "What are you going to do about it?" I asked.

This remark may not strike the reader as being quite original, but I beg to assure him at the period in which I write it had not become famous, nor been incorporated with the slang of the day.

"Why, I must confess to a fondness for a pretty kitten," returned Elizabeth, laughingly. "I should not admit it if I were single, but now it can do no harm."

"Dear little Dora! How gratified she will be. I am sorry we could not have made the visit."

"Why couldn't we go now? Take some Saturday afternoon and return on Monday."

"To be sure," I answered, much pleased with the suggestion, as I stroked satin smooth Maltie, who in turn rubbed my hand and looked grateful out of her emerald eyes. "But you said *two* surprises!"

"The other is a marriage. You can't guess!"



"Not unless it is your hero Van Bricklebach."

"No! How absurd. Mr. Collins and Miss St. John. It has taken everybody by surprise, for no one thought Mr. Collins a marrying man. What legions of girls have been thrown at his head!"

"Rather hard for the young women."

"Oh, Adolphus, you *do* take everything so literally. My goodness! think of a cloud of girls flying through the air!"

"The man would succumb at once."

"But no one would ever know *which* girl carried off the honors!" and Elizabeth laughed. "Addie Knox was just crazy after him. She did act like a fool. So did Belle Carrick. Well, no one can accuse *me* of wearing the willow, and Elizabeth bridled her head proudly.

"And now comes the tug of war. What shall we give them?" and I thought over the lamentable state of my finances.

"She sent me that link bracelet with rubies. It's a great clumsy thing, and makes your wrist look frightfully large, and I half suspect it was one she had. I know she *did* have a pair with very handsome emeralds, and it is the easiest thing in the world to have jewels changed, and any old article polished up."

"Why," I made answer, "that is a cheap way to repay obligations and get rid of your old stock. Can't you send some of your numerous gifts? It seems to me that we could spare a few."



“Adolphus!” reproachfully; “all my gifts were on exhibition, and it *would* be remarked; besides, the Collins will live in style, and they will be nice friends to have, so I would not be mean for anything. Mr. Collins sent my beautiful crystal, you know; being in the business, it did n’t cost him so much, of course. But we must think of something. They are to have a grand evening reception, and go to Washington.”

I groaned inwardly. There was no help for it I plainly understood. It was one of the debts of society, that like gambling losses, must be paid if it beggared one. And there was no knowing where it would stop. Every friend of Elizabeth’s would get married in the course of time, or their children, or their grandchildren. I wondered if the obligation of wedding gifts descended any further in the social scale.

Elizabeth was in such a magnificent humor, that I felt I would be standing in my own light or comfort to argue any point with her. Republican homes, like other institutions of wisdom and beneficence, need a certain degree of toleration, for if the privileges and sinecures of the upper house be infringed upon, no stronghold of library or study is proof against well-planned attacks, sorties, surprises, and much miscellaneous skirmishing. And after all, I had only to foot the bill. The racking anxiety; the hours of intense and wearing comparison as to conflicting claims of bronze, engraving, painting, solid silver, laces and fashionable bijouterie; the long



and wearisome tramps ; the snubs and sulky looks of clerks. Was I not spared all this ?

For the next week we had wedding gifts served up in every shape. As our Mary was rather a failure with the cuisine, it did make a variety. Elizabeth called upon one friend and another, and learned by adroit questioning what they proposed to send. She did not mean to be duplicated this time, if human foresight could avoided it.

“ There ! ” she announced in triumph, as she displayed two hideous oval pictures, the design of which would certainly have suited any old Quaker martyr in Fox’s book, for they were not the likeness of anything on the earth or beneath the waters, at least there was one thing that seemed to commence a toad, develop a lobster, continue a tortoise and end in a fish, and might have been a brilliant exponent of the Darwin theory, though I was glad nothing of the kind had survived ; also that I had not been alive to fish in those days. What nerves men must have had when the softly gliding ichthyosaurus and plesiosaurus sported in the circling waves, and the graceful Megatherium glanced out from pre-Adamic forest. True, they have not found the individual ; but modern science unearths every thing sooner or later.

“ What may those be ? ” I inquired, mildly, while a shiver ran down my spinal column.

“ Plaques, my dear,” she responded severely, and I knew then her conscience was entirely at rest. “ Limoges plaques, to be put up in a dining-room. I happened to



meet Van Bricklebach and Preston Caruth, who is a great collector of antiques, you know. Nothing *can* deceive him, and he said those were remarkable."

"That is just the word—remarkable," I replied.

"Of course I do not expect *you* to appreciate them, Adolphus. One's perception and taste, and ever so many other qualities, have to be severely trained before one can understand the wonderful design and superior workmanship. They were one hundred and twenty dollars—very cheap, Caruth said, and there will be nothing like them, I know. So much better than perishable laces and fripperies, and I knew she would have loads of silver. Beside, such things as these give one a reputation for a higher style of mind. It takes no genius to go to Stewart's and buy point lace."

I was really thankful no one had done quite so fearfully by us. To sit down at a meal and have that horrible thing staring you in the face, would be enough to take away one's appetite.

We went to the reception, and found with much elation there was nothing like our gift. Miss De Witt, a tall, thin spinster, who wore tinted glasses, and had entered several pictures at the academy, stood over them, her hands clasped in rapture. Elizabeth was wild with delight at being thus appreciated.

Half a dozen other marriages occurred between this and Christmas ; but they were not very much. Twenty or thirty dollars' worth of silver settled them ; yet in the



aggregate I found it had cost me one hundred and forty dollars. Then my charmer had to be indulged in some new attire. Even her Worth dress was pronounced passe, and she admitted to me in the privacy of marital confidence that it was a humbug ; but still it gave one tone and style.

We had also signalized the first anniversary of our marriage by a regular party. The parlors had been packed, and I think it was about as uncomfortable as any torture modern civilization has invented. During the festivities there was a considerable slaughter of glass and china, and a Majolica vase had been thrown down and broken. The bills and damages footed up nearly four hundred dollars, but Elizabeth gave me her solemn assurance that it would never be necessary to do the same thing again. She had paid her debt to society, and established her claim.

But how were all these things to be met ? Like many another I was in the whirl, and put off the evil day as long as possible. The opening of the year might bring me a little surplus, and I prayed devoutly for such to be the case. Meanwhile, I borrowed money of friends until I began to be ashamed to look them squarely in the face.



## CHAPTER VI.

It was the week before Christmas. Our furnace had acted like a thing possessed of a demon ; if you had any heat you were half suffocated with gas ; if you turned the draughts on, the heat escaped up the chimney. Elizabeth and I sat shivering over our dining-room register, she with watery eyes and a bad cold in her head.

There was a furious ring at the door bell.

Lucy ran down, wild-eyed with fright, and exclaimed tremulously, "Oh, ma'am ! Oh, Mr. Stryker ! It's Mr. Von Trump. He's had a stroke, the man said, or a fit of apoplexy."

Elizabeth screamed and threw herself into my arms.

"And you're to come round right away. Oh, Mrs. Stryker, do n't faint."

Elizabeth rose with the occasion, figuratively as well as in the material pose. In a slightly nasal and deeply sepulchral tone, she exclaimed, "My dear Adolphus ! We must go at once. Poor aunt Von Trump ! Not a soul in the house but servants !" Then she fell to weeping on my neck, and after that we marched up stairs to make ourselves ready.

We found the house literally full. Servants were running to and fro, two or three doctors were present and political friends began to gather. Uncle Von Trump



had been taken to the sitting-room up stairs. Aunt Von Trump was wringing her hands, while the maid stood over her with restoratives. Elizabeth rushed to her arms, and they mingled their tears together.

Somewhere towards morning it was decided that uncle Von Trump was really dead. He had partaken of a very hearty dinner, it seemed, and sat quite awhile over his wine. Presently he had fallen from his chair, but as James undertook to raise him upon his feet, he found, to use his expressive but somewhat vulgar phraseology, "that it was something more than common."

I started down town about nine o'clock laden with messages and errands. I ran in to see Mr. Trask, and explain that I must necessarily be absent for several days. Then I returned, and Elizabeth desired me to go home and hunt up all her jewelry and put it in the safe, lock the bureau drawers and the wardrobe, all of which commissions I executed with the utmost ability and promptitude.

I will pass briefly over a melancholy week. Uncle Von Trump was buried in tremendous state. Societies and friends turned out to do him honor; there was a great display of black cloth, velvet, silver, and flowers. Indeed, the coffin was fairly smothered with them. They were taken to the grave in a separate carriage and piled over the mound. Newspapers teemed with obituary notices of our eminent and respected citizen, though



in what particular branch he had distinguished himself I failed to discover.

Elizabeth put on the deepest black. The blinds of our own house were kept closed a month, out of respect, and she was not at home to callers. Indeed, she was home very little anyhow, for aunt Von Trump could not spare her. The Bridget of our kitchen ran riot, and gave parties. I surprised her one night in the dining-room with our choice glass and china spread out in gorgeous array, and an army of Mikes, Pats, Dennises, with their wives and sweethearts. I was equal to the emergency, and discharged her on the spot with a dignity worthy of Elizabeth.

Meanwhile, the first of January had come in, and we had gone over our yearly account. Business had fallen off considerably, and there had been some losses. There was a kind of ominous feeling in financial circles. I found myself the happy possessor of eleven hundred dollars, surplus, and five hundred dollars, new bills, since the first of September. We certainly had not lived within our income.

I settled up the straggling items, and reduced my former indebtedness to two thousand. I declared resolutely to myself that we must turn over a new leaf, and attack economy with relentless vigor.

Uncle Von Trump had left no will. I must confess, narrow-minded as it may seem, that at first I had a slight hope that Elizabeth might be remembered hand-



somely. But presently, ugly rumors began to be put afloat. There was a great deal of property, but it was mortgaged for about its full value. The Fifth Avenue house was settled upon aunt Von Trump, yet that had a considerable encumbrance. There was a life insurance of five thousand dollars for her benefit also.

"The amount of it is, that uncle Von Trump has been shamefully treated," said Elizabeth, with a severe judicial aspect. "He was so good-hearted and generous. He trusted everybody, and was always working for his political friends, and now look at the result. Aunt Von Trump won't have ten thousand dollars out of it all. It's a shame. And she will have to give up her elegant house, her horses, and everything."

Here Elizabeth gave way to a flood of violent, hysterical tears. I soothed and comforted.

William Von Trump came on from California to attend to some business for the firm he was with. His mother received him very graciously. He was an extremely fine looking man, with a bright, brisk business aspect, and a courteous manner. He persuaded his mother to return with him, and it seemed to me the most sensible way out of the dilemma. We heard afterwards that she admired her daughter-in-law very much. As for the poor young man abroad, no one seemed to trouble their heads about him.

The parting between Elizabeth and her aunt was very affecting. For several days afterwards she scarcely sat



up, and could speak only in the most languid of tones. The strain on her nerves had been terrible, and parting with dear aunt Von Trump was almost more than she could endure. She hoped in time her nerves would recover their usual tone ; but she was afraid she would never be quite the same again.

I was very desirous of discussing some household matters with Elizabeth. We were plainly living beyond our means, and retrenchment of some kind was absolutely necessary. But how approach the delicate subject ! We had a very nice tidy cook now, and there seemed an actual pleasure in living. But the two thousand dollars weighed heavily upon me, and our monthly allowance had proved insufficient. Something must be done

“ Elizabeth,” I said, coming home somewhat excited one evening, “ can you explain this ? Here is a bill the executors have sent to me, for a chamber suite. It cannot be—”

“ Let me see it, Adolphus,” and she reached up from the sofa where she was lying. “ Why—” in a tone of the utmost surprise—“ it cannot be—carved and gilt bedstead—yes, it surely is. Adolphus, it is this very set, my pride and beauty, my memento of dear uncle, and this bill is—a deliberate swindle. Oh, I wish I could see the man who sent it.”

“ He is to call to-morrow. Shall I refer him to you ? ”

A rather embarrassed expression crossed my wife’s face.



“Adolphus, dear,” and her tone was in striking contrast to her last remark, “you do n’t suppose there is a mistake, do you? If I were you I should go to Graff & Lehman’s and inquire before we moved in the matter. It *is* my bridal set, but I *know* it must have been paid for. They have confused it with something else. I wish I were well enough to go out to-morrow and attend to it, but you had better. Five hundred and fifty dollars! I *knew* it was expensive,” smiling sweetly with a woman’s gratified pride. “And dear uncle was so generous about my wedding.”

I put the bill in my pocket, but I had a secret misgiving that I should be called upon to pay for the mistake. I went down to Graff & Co.’s the first thing the next morning.

“I want to know about this bill,” I demanded with a brave front.

“Ah—” and the gentlemanly bookkeeper gave it a casual glance. “Are you Mr. Adolphus Stryker?”

“I am,” I replied, with the utmost dignity. I should like to have crushed the fellow where he stood for his cool air of authority.

“Well, this is—one of those affairs that occasionally happen,” and he gave a little nod that was most irritating. “You married old Von Trump’s niece, I believe?”

Old Von Trump! The man deserved to be knocked down for his disrespect.



"I married Miss Elizabeth Von Trump. Yes, he was her uncle," I replied in a tone of severe and formidable dignity.

"Well, this suite was ordered for her. The executors refuse to have anything to do with it. There is n't half enough left to pay his own bills. We had to take back the parlor furniture and sell it at auction. The old gentleman was a regular buffer! The hardest old chap to get money out of—it came like drawing teeth."

"But this bill—"

"You have the furniture, I presume—at least, your wife has?" and the man indulged in a provoking grin.

"It is in our possession."

"And it was a debt contracted for your wife. I believe, sir, the law makes you the responsible party."

"You can take it back," I said, beginning to feel myself somewhat of a victim.

"But we don't want it back, my dear sir," with the utmost blandness; "and we do want our money."

"I will not pay it," I declared in an excited tone of voice. "You may send and get it to-day, any time. It is a regular swindle."

"We do not propose to be swindled," said the imperturbable man. "You are of the firm of Trask, Keep & Co., leather dealers, are you not?"

I assented with glowering eyes.

"Very well, Mr. Stryker. I think you will find it to your interest to settle this account. We will give you



thirty days, and after that commence a suit, *not* for the furniture," and again he smiled his exasperatingly bland smile, "but for the money. Good-morning, sir," and he walked away.

I stood quite crestfallen. To be sued in a common justice's court. I, Adolphus Stryker, who had hitherto borne an unblemished reputation, who had kept out of debt and saved up a little money year by year, until this ill-fated madness overtook me. There were women in the world beside old Von Trump's niece. They might not have been as well dowered in the way of wedding gifts, and I laughed bitterly. Had not these very gifts been the beginning of my discomfort?

I considered all day. At times I resolved to defy the world and not permit myself to be swindled. They trusted Anthony Von Trump, not Adolphus Stryker.

"Are you not feverish, Adolphus?" asked old Mr. Trask in kindly tones. "There is a curious wildness in your eyes, and your voice trembles when you talk. If you are not well—"

"I am quite well. That is," I went on confusedly, "I have a headache, and some little matters have rather bothered me."

"Adolphus, I have wanted to ask you; you were not foolish enough, I hope, to put your name to any of old Von Trump's notes?"

"No. Indeed, he never asked me," I replied quite decisively, thankful that it was the truth.



"I am very glad. He was supposed to be very wealthy, but I always have my doubts of men of that stamp. His property I hear is all mortgaged, and there will not be enough left to pay the just debts. Had your wife anything involved?"

"I believe not."

It occurred to me then to wonder what had become of Elizabeth's fortune. I had not heard her refer to it in some time.

I had not married Elizabeth from any base or selfish motives. She had loved me, and I had—well I had forgotten my ideal, who somewhat resembled Kitty Bromley, and for the rest, I could not well explain it to myself. There is a profound mystery about love and marriage, which sacrilegious hands must not profane, nor curious eyes seek to penetrate. If it were not so, where would be the theme for poet and novelist. I did not wholly understand it myself, even after having been admitted to the sacred fane, and knelt among its worshippers. Elizabeth was my wife, and there was but one cause of dissent between us. She could not seem to understand what was meant by being a poor man's wife. That was her misfortune, certainly. I had been brought up to habits of rigorous economy and prudence, a horror of debt, and a belief that it was dishonest to live beyond one's means. True, I was learning that the modern school of financiers rather sneered at this old-fashioned creed, but, certainly, I did not see how I could even



apply the later method to Graff & Co. There was the debt, and here was a disgraceful suit for my wife's wedding gifts.

I went home quite early. Elizabeth was lying on the bed in the daintiest of white frilled wrappers, and a coquettish little cap of lace and rose-colored ribbons.

"Oh, my dear," she cried, raising her white hand entreatingly, "don't step quite so heavily. My poor head has been so bad all day. The slightest sound goes through it like a knife. Put on your slippers, won't you, that's a darling."

I hastened to do this, then I came around and kissed her tenderly. She did look very pale, my poor Elizabeth.

"I knew nature would revenge herself," she said with a soft sigh. "We cannot outrage any law without suffering the penalty. My devotion to poor aunt through her bitter sorrow and trouble, the grief of parting with one who had been like a mother, and the haunting thought of dear uncle's newly made grave, *has* prostrated me. And yet I meant to be so brave for your sake, my darling Adolphus. You are so patient and tender to real suffering that sometimes I feel—"

Elizabeth closed her eyes and the tears overflowed. I wiped them away. I soothed and caressed her until the dinner bell rang.

"I hate to have you go down to your solitary meal," and there was a tenderly, regretful expression in her



eyes. "Tell Lucy to bring me up a bit of chicken and a cup of tea."

I read aloud to Elizabeth that evening. Of course I could not worry her with business. Indeed, for a week she continued much the same. Some days she went out in the carriage with her dear friend Laura, but she was not able to come down to her meals.

A fortnight passed. The agent of the house paid me a second visit, this time with lease in hand.

"I shall give up the house," I said briefly. "It is a higher rent than I can afford to pay."

"Give up the house?" and the man raised his eyebrows in surprise. "My dear sir, you should have done that before. Are you aware that it is the first of April?"

"What has that to do with it?" For a moment I was tempted to use a profane expletive.

"A three months' notice is customary—"

"But I told you the first of January I did not think I should stay," I interrupted impatiently.

"You have said nothing since. You have given us no notice to rent the house. We *may* be able to lease it during the month, and we may not. We shall hold you responsible until—"

"You will hold me for nothing," and I glared at the man fiercely. "Put up a bill to-morrow. Rent your house to whom you like!"

"We shall see what the law will do," and nodding triumphantly, he left the office.



I rushed around to a friend well versed in legal affairs. Could I be held another year?

He laughingly pooh-poohed the matter. It was a ruse of the agent. I could go out on the first of May with flying colors.

Then I dropped into the sanctum of another acquaintance.

He was very cautious, and of the opinion that I could be held. Not justly, however. The man would bring his suit, depending upon some legal quibble, or some inadvertent word I might have dropped—there were so many devious ways in law. And if I should win, the fellow could appeal and make no end of trouble and expense.

“And this is justice!” I cried savagely. “This is the boasted liberty of the nineteenth century, this great era of progress! Our fathers fought that we might again be enslaved by a tyrannous house agent. Never! Never!”

“Mind, I don’t say that he will, or can; but he *might*.”

I dashed out of the office. Had a man any rights that laws were bound to respect?

“Elizabeth,” I said that evening—for I knew the battle must come—“I had a call from the agent of our house to-day. He said, that is, I mean I said—and a more insolent jackanapes I never saw—”

“He was here,” returned Elizabeth, serenely. “I thought him very gentlemanly. He said you were undecided, and—I supposed you sent him here, Adolphus, to



see what I thought, and we talked matters over in a friendly way. Rents for desirable houses *have* increased, and you know what a trouble we had to find this. I told him we would remain another year—”

“The scoundrel! The sneaking, impertinent villain! I gave up the house!”

“Adolphus, you need not roar so! I am not deaf, and my nerves have been in such a sensitive state since dear uncle’s death. And how do you suppose I could move, in my poor health and all?” and she looked at me with the sadness of a deeply injured saint.

“We cannot stay here. We have run behind steadily since we came to this house. For the first time in my life I have been in debt, the whole year! We must retrench!”

She leaned back in her chair and wiped a falling tear from her cheek.

“Adolphus,” she said with pathetic intonation, “how much do you think we shall gain by moving?”

“We *must* save somewhere. Fifteen hundred dollars is my utmost limit for rent.”

“And you know what shells and rookeries we saw for that price. If ever a woman did her full duty by house-hunting, I did last spring. And now we will see. First, there will be car fares in every direction, for I am *not* able to walk, and poor aunt’s carriage is no longer at my disposal. Then there will be cleaning, and no one can estimate the repairs. Even in this new house, there has



been so much trouble with the range and the plumbing, you know, and now we have everything in excellent order. All that will cost, at least, one hundred and fifty dollars. Then a man must come to pack the furniture, and it will take him a full week, I know; and then the cartmen, who always charge outrageously at the first of May, and then the man to lay the carpets, and a man to put up the shades and the curtains, and some one to unpack, and cook will go off in a huff—they always do—and I shall get a dreadful cold, and so will you, and there will be doctor's bills, and heaven only knows what all. Then we shall be miserable and crowded, and our lives will be a burthen to us the whole year—”

With that harrowing picture, Elizabeth broke down and sobbed audibly.

For several moments I sat in speechless astonishment. I made a mental inventory of our belongings from the top of the house to the bottom. Did any one dare call these household gods? Household demons, rather. How the men had tugged and worked to get that safe up stairs. How they had grazed walls and doorways, with that infernal bedstead, I was going to say to myself, but remembered in time. What could we do with all these things in a smaller house?

“I do not see what you would make, Adolphus!” began my wife afresh, in a very hysterical voice. “It would cost at least five hundred dollars. If you don't believe me, and it is very hard to be doubted by the



husband to whom you have given your very soul, and for whom you would lay down your life—indeed, I would, Adolphus. I sometimes think I did wrong to marry you, but I loved you, and I could not sell myself for base gold. But if you regret—” and before I could even imagine, Elizabeth had knelt at my feet.

“My dear,” I cried, “my darling, my sweet, heroic Elizabeth ;” but she lay senseless in my arms.

I bore her to the bed. I bathed the marble face and the icy hands. I besought her by every fond endearment, and presently she opened her eyes.

“Forgive me,” she pleaded faintly. “Adolphus, I am afraid I have burthened your life. But perhaps, my darling, I shall not live long. I feel sometimes as if my sensitive nerves would outwear my frail body. And when I am lying in Greenwood, dear, you’ll come and strew a few flowers over me, will you not ? You’ll think of the pleasant hours in our lives, the time when we first loved, and were all in all to each other. I am sure I meant to please you, and to make you happy ; but if I have failed in my short life to—to—” and my dear wife was weeping softly.

“My darling,” and I knelt beside the bed, seized her hand and covered it with kisses. “My darling, don’t talk of dying !”

“Perhaps it would be better,” she went on faintly, quite as if she had made up her mind ; while every word was like a dagger thrust to my miserable soul. “I’ve



had queer, strange feelings about my heart, and last summer the doctor warned me to avoid excitements. ‘You must live in an equable mental atmosphere’—those were his very words—‘or I will not answer for the consequences. So you see, dear, I could hardly undertake the bustle and anxiety of moving, and if I were laid away at rest in the quiet grave, some good strong woman might come in as housekeeper, and manage things. Adolphus, dear, *would* you let me make a will?’ and she raised her eyes pleadingly to mine. “There are a few of my wedding gifts I would like to bequeath to friends, and—and—I suppose you will marry again—”

“Never! Never!” I reiterated with the utmost solemnity. “Oh, my darling, do not talk of dying. You break my heart,” and I buried my face in the counterpane.

“Would you be glad to have me live, dear?” and her voice sounded like an angel’s whisper. “Life is sweet, but rather than become a burthen—”

I wept, I prayed, I implored. I told her that if she died I should always have the remorse of a murderer gnawing at my soul; that I should never dare look my fellow-creatures in the face; that I should become a wanderer and an exile, and at last perish miserably. She bent over and kissed me, and begged me to live for her sake, and she would try her best to be a devoted and economical wife. And so we made peace.

I went down town the next morning and signed the



lease, though I experienced a strong desire to throttle that bland and smiling agent. And now I must provide for the payment of the five hundred and fifty dollars. Borrow again, of course.

To convince myself, I made out a list of moving expenses, at Elizabeth's dictation. I found that we would not be much the gainer, and to go into a house where there were roaches and bugs and every crawling thing, and where people might have had typhus and small pox and diphtheria, did not appear inviting. We had better let well enough alone.

Elizabeth improved slowly, but she was so sweet and patient, that my heart smote me for having ever opposed any wish of hers. She could not help having handsome bridal presents, and if people had neglected to pay for them, she surely was not to blame. But I never would have supposed that it could cost so much for two people to live. I gave the cook many useful hints upon domestic economy that I gleaned from Kitty Bromley in strictest confidence. I made various suggestions, and insisted that we could not afford to supply the horde of street beggars with poultry and porter-house steak, pound cake and macaroons.

"Cook has gone off in high dudgeon!" announced Elizabeth. "My dear Adolphus, I wish you would not meddle in the kitchen. No girl will take any interference. If they can't have their way they won't work at all, and a man is n't expected to be prying about closets



and cellars, and kettles and pans, and giving orders. The lower classes have feelings and prejudices as well as ourselves."

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## CHAPTER VII.

ELIZABETH's friends were very kind, and through the balmy May, she was taken out driving nearly every day. We also went down to Longport for several days, and the Waltons entertained us delightfully, I must say. Dora was shooting up into a tall, pretty girl, with a bright, inquisitive, independent order of mind. Our kitten thrived finely, and was very cunning, and Dora was much pleased with her good report.

Elizabeth laid off her mourning, and began to go into society again. The great world had forgotten old Von Trump, and was engaged with still more notable people. There was a great excitement about the ring now ; some of its heroes were holding up their heads defiantly, others were flying to foreign lands. Von Trump's swindles looked petty compared to these.

Once the matter of the furniture had been touched upon. Elizabeth declared with tears, that she knew uncle Von Trump had *meant* to pay for it, and she did n't doubt but he had. People were sometimes compelled to pay bills twice if they could not produce a re-



ceipt. So many of his papers had been destroyed, and she was sure that must have been with them. "Why," she asked, with lofty scorn, "did they not send it while he was alive? That alone proves it a base, underhand action."

I did not think it worth while to destroy her beautiful and childlike faith in her dead relative by telling her that Graff & Co.'s collector had pronounced him "the hardest old duffer to get money out of that he had ever seen, and that he had asked him for the amount fifty times at least," but I am tempted to believe the latter statement a slight exaggeration.

And now came the all-absorbing question as to where Elizabeth should go for the summer. Old Mr. Trask was breaking considerably, and I saw plainly that I must be closely confined to business. The doctor declared a couple of months somewhere would set up Elizabeth completely.

"And you know how well I was all last fall and winter," she said brightly. "I do desire to have my health above all things. A fretful, peevish, ailing wife must be a great trial to any husband, and you are so good, Adolphus, that I feel I ought to take care of myself for your sake."

When Elizabeth uttered such sentiments with her adorable smile, I felt straightway as if I must fall down and worship her.

About this time Lucy gave notice. She was going to



marry a fine young Englishman, who was gardener and steward at a handsome country place in Westchester county. There was a pretty little lodge house for them to commence the practice of domestic economy, and I must say, I never joined Elizabeth in the purchase of wedding gifts with a better heart. Lucy seemed really sorry to go. She was married one day in church, and my wife gave her a pretty wedding feast in our dining-room, to which a dozen or so friends were invited.

I resolved to keep house as I had last summer. Elizabeth went to Watch Hill and then to Newport, and from thence to sundry seaside resorts, returning to me in a transcendently blooming state of health, after having made some of the loveliest friends that mortal woman could desire.

But alas ! Let no woman call herself happy until the race of handmaidens is extinct. It really seemed as if all the ills of Pandora's box were showered upon our devoted heads. The cook stole our silver and decamped, the maid purloined laces and jewelry, and both had very high-toned moral reports from their last places. The next one smashed things generally, while her up-stairs compeer emptied our wine bottles. Then it seemed as if every person we knew sent us wedding cards, and presents increased and multiplied. Our next duo quarrelled frightfully. I wondered sometimes how Elizabeth's health and temper stood the continued assaults.

At last we met with an admirable kitchen girl, a



widow of middle age, who had lived at several summer hotels and had piles of references from people in various sections of the country. I wrote to two parties and found everything correct. She was such a nice, pleasant, sensible body and did her work well, besides being so scrupulously honest that a stray penny on the floor was sure to be returned to its owner. Then Lucy, who had kept up a kindly interest in us, came in one day to say a cousin of hers, Rose Muldoon, was shortly coming over. She was about twenty-five, and had been lady's maid in an excellent Scottish family of quality; could alter dresses and do up laces, and in short was a paragon. Elizabeth was delighted. She would take her, of course, and be very thankful to have so efficient a person.

"We shall begin to live once more," she declared. "The past three months have been like a frightful dream. And my beautiful china is nothing but a wreck! I don't believe, Adolphus, that it would cost any more to get an entire new set than to have that matched. Joanna is so careful of everything that it will last years when it is complete once more."

I made no reply. My private contemplation of bills was not cheerful and inspiring. I was more than ever convinced that we were living beyond our means, and that with the coming spring something must be done.

"The McFaddens are to give a grand Christmas eve ball," said Elizabeth, greeting me with a kiss. "We have been absolutely no where this winter, and we *must*



go. Laura sent a private note to me, and begs that we will not let anything interfere. There, I know you are going to say something about dress, but I've found a treasure of a dressmaker, and mean to have two old party dresses made into one, and as this is not a wedding, nor a surprise, and there will be no gifts of any kind I don't see how you *can* refuse."

I could not certainly, although I knew by past experience what treasures of dressmakers and loves of milliners cost, and not infrequently the cheap ones proved the dearest in the end. But I felt the more willing to indulge Elizabeth now, as I did mean on the opening of the new year to give up the house, even if I had to wade through acres of domestic warfare, and seas of tears.

I must say that Elizabeth looked very elegant on the night of the party. Like a dutiful husband I brought her home a hot-house bouquet of tea roses and heliotrope, and she declared that and her gloves were the only things for which she had spent any money. She was in excellent spirits too, and I fancied I felt uncommonly well. I put the silver in the safe, barred the basement windows and doors, and gave Joanna strict injunctions about carefulness, and the fires.

"And you really need not sit up," said Elizabeth, graciously. "It is doubtful if we are home before two o'clock."

"Thank you," returned Joanna, respectfully. "I do



feel rather tired and I may go to bed in an hour or two."

"Very well;" and Elizabeth picked up her flowing train, while I carried her gloves in my vest pocket, and her bouquet wrapped round with tissue paper.

The McFadden mansion was well filled with guests when we reached it, and still they came. It seemed as if half the city must have been invited. Knots of Mac's political friends, railroad men, a sprinkling of bankers and brokers, and wives and daughters, gotten up most gorgeously. They jostled and crowded and tore each others trains, and the dancing was quite a failure, though the music was of the best. And what words shall do justice to the supper! It was magnificent with superb black waiters and every delicacy in season. Choice wines sparkled and flowed freely; there was no lack of jest or laughter. Toward the last it began to grow rather boisterous, but the ladies and many of their cavaliers retired to the drawing-room. Some went home immediately, and the younger portion recommenced dancing with new zest.

It was nearly three when we left. A sound of coarse revelry was coming up from the supper room, and some of the women were losing their freshness. I was very tired, to tell the truth, for it seemed as if I had been elbowing my way continually.

"How splendid it all was!" declared Elizabeth, regretfully. "The McFaddens don't seem to mind a bit



how they spend money, and Laura is such a dear, good, generous creature. Adolphus, if there only was some way of getting into politics !”

“But there is n’t when you have no head for such matters,” was my response.

“I don’t think Mac so very smart, do you? And I do know people who are much better bred—more refined—and who could make quite as good use of wealth. I do wonder if you will ever be rich, my dear?”

“Never !” I could have responded with heroic fortitude, but I refrained from paining my charmer.

We reached our own quiet residence, and I opened the door with my latch key. The light was burning low in the hall, and after Elizabeth threaded her way up stairs with her train on her arm, I locked the door, put out the light and followed. Joanna, up stairs, was no doubt sleeping the sleep of the just. I officiated to the best of my ability as lady’s maid, and shortly after we were in bed the clock struck four. From that time until seven I slept soundly, and then was awakened by the noises in the street. As there was no need of disturbing Elizabeth, I turned over and settled myself for another snooze. No going down town to-day.

Sometime afterward my wife stirred and spoke.

“I do wonder if Joanna has overslept herself! Do you hear any stir, Adolphus? Good gracious! I almost forgot. Merry Christmas! I do wonder what you are



going to give me! Has the bell rung yet? and don't you think the room very cold?"

I replied to several of these interrogatories, and then listened. The house seemed exceedingly still. "Joanna!" I called up the stairway. "Joanna!"

No response.

"She must have gone down," I said.

"I suppose she thought we wanted to sleep late. I think Joanna the greatest treasure we ever had. Now, if I get that Rose, we shall begin to live again."

I decided not to return to bed, and proceeded with my toilet, while my wife discoursed in all the freedom of marital confidence. Something certainly must be the matter. I could get no warm water, and the register remained obstinately stone cold.

"I'll go down and see," I said to the wife of my bosom.

The kitchen was dark and cold. I opened the shutters. Everything was tidy as a new pin, but no cheerful Joanna.

I sprang up stairs at a bound or two, and announced the state of affairs to Elizabeth.

"She is still asleep, or she must be sick," I said, and going up to her door I knocked, gently at first, then louder, then loudest, and tried the knob. The door was locked, and there was no answer.

Elizabeth came up in wrapper and shawl.

"Oh, Adolphus," she cried, nervously, "what can be



the matter ? *Do* you suppose she has died in her bed all alone, poor thing ? had a fit perhaps, and not a soul near her. What can you do ? ”

“ I don’t know, except to burst the door open. She certainly cannot be alive.”

“ Oh, dear ; and on Christmas morning, too ! Will we have to have an inquest, and a post-mortem, and everything ? and it will always haunt me when I am alone, for my nerves are so susceptible to the slightest shock.”

I made two ineffectual attempts, but at the third, the door yielded, and I went tumbling head first into Joanna’s bed. The shock rather confused me for an instant.

“ Why, Adolphus ! And she is not here ! ”

I glanced about awe-stricken. The bed had not been disturbed, except by my sudden onslaught.

“ Where can she be ? In the cellar, perhaps, stone dead. Something terrible has happened.”

“ Adolphus ! you must go for an officer at once ; and oh ! I can’t be left alone in this dreadful house,” and she grasped my arm.

“ Let us make a thorough search ourselves. Remember we found one delectable Bridget drunk in the china closet. Even our faultless Joanna may have yielded to temptation and celebrated Christmas eve too overwhelmingly.”

We peered into every nook and cranny on our way



down. Elizabeth could not bring her generous mind to believe ill of her handmaiden. The house was in perfect order, and at length we reached the cellar.

We both shivered with cold and apprehension. Would I find a mangled corpse below !

"You cannot go down !" cried my wife, in terror. "Adolphus, you must get an officer."

"See here," I said, with a sudden gleam of courage, "the door is bolted. No one can be down here."

"She may have been murdered and thrown down ;" and Elizabeth looked at me with wildest eyes.

"But in that case there must have been some way of escape. We have found nothing disturbed, and no door open. Yes," I continued, bravely, "I will venture to explore the cellar. And I am quite sure the furnace fire is out."

I lighted a lamp and went down, but I must confess my heart beat ominously. What tragedy had taken place in my house on quiet, heavenly Christmas eve, when the whole world should be devoted to peace and good will !

I found no frightful corpse. Joanna might be tucked into the potato barrel, but she was a rather large woman, or she might be buried in the coal bin. There was no sign of a newly-made grave anywhere.

"All right, Elizabeth," I shouted. "She is not here."

I opened the furnace door, and found there was some



fire. After administering a vigorous shaking and a generous supply of coal, I returned to the upper regions.

"Joanna is not in the house," I said, firmly. "She may have been called away after we were gone, or she may have left of her own free will and supreme pleasure. Our first duty is to make a kitchen fire, our next to examine whether any of our household goods have departed in the wake of Joanna."

"Oh my gracious, Adolphus!" and Elizabeth sprang up in a way that would have done credit to the stage. "You don't mean—you can't think—"

I pulled out dampers, raked, clattered, made a great fuss, as a man always does with a fire, while Elizabeth kept up a steady stream of ejaculations, protestations, beliefs, disbeliefs, certainties, supposes, doubts and fears, and at length flew up stairs. I lighted the fire, burned my finger, but the thing blazed and cracked cheerfully, and with a great comfortable shiver that seemed to shake out the cold of the last hour, I sat down beside the range and rubbed my much soiled hands.

A wild shriek from Elizabeth, who came flying down stairs, startled me from the comfortable posture. What horrible vision had met her eyes?

"It is all true—true! Adolphus!" she raved. "That awful, deceitful, horrible woman! Go for an officer at once! How could she do such a thing, when I thought her a—a—paragon! I would have trusted her



—I did trust her, and she has been like the serpent warmed and fed—”

“Then you have found her?” I interrupted, springing up and brandishing the poker. “Where is the vile creature?”

“Where is she? How should I know, Adolphus? But she has taken my gold card receiver, and some of my lovely parlor ornaments, and my jewelry and my India shawl, and Heaven only knows all! And where is the key of the safe?”

Elizabeth’s voice had been gradually growing higher and higher, and she ended with a cry that would not have shamed an Irish banshee, as she sank into a chair.

“The key of the safe? But Joanna could not open it?”

“Yes, she could,” sobbed Elizabeth. “I showed her only a few days ago. I trusted her so. You know, Adolphus, you said you were sure she looked honest and good, and you had such faith in her after all the miserable wretches we had had. I’m sure you liked her and were just as much delighted with her as I was. And I can’t find the safe key, and I know she’s stolen everything there is in it. My beautiful silver set! My precious wedding gifts!” and her hysterical wails filled the room.

I filled the kettle, washed my hands at the kitchen sink, went up stairs to brush my hair and made myself ready for a short tour.



"Elizabeth," I said grimly, buttoning my overcoat up to the chin, "I am going around to the station house."

"Oh, Adolphus, do not leave me," she implored.

"I must," I answered, with Spartan firmness, making a hasty exit.

My story was soon told. Captain Weeks accompanied me home to obtain full details. We roused a locksmith from his luxuriant fireside, and bade him look up some tools and follow us directly.

With the aid of my weeping Elizabeth, we went through the house again, and found that it had been literally cleaned out of all pertaining to gold or silver. My elegant beaver overcoat was gone, and two of my wife's silk dresses, her India shawl and her thread-lace mantle. After a severe struggle, the safe was forced open, only to show us how complete the devastation had been.

"I think this woman belongs to a regularly organized gang of burglars," said Captain Weeks. "Where did she come from?"

We could not remember, but in my memorandum I had made a note of the people to whom I had applied for reference. One was a Mr. James Hunt, of Stamford; the other a Mr. William Prescott, of Staten Island.

"And you say both of these people answered you immediately? What reason did she give for leaving them?" he asked.



"Mr. Prescott's family had given up housekeeping, or they would not have dreamed of parting with so efficient and capable a woman. And the other—well, I really don't remember, but it seemed very satisfactory."

"Some confederate answered these letters for her no doubt. Give me the addresses and I will see if they can be verified. Now an accurate description of the woman," and Captain Weeks took out book and pencil.

She was rather tall. Elizabeth and I agreed about that, and medium as to stoutness. But for the life of me I couldn't remember the color of her eyes. Elizabeth said first that they were dark blue or grey, then she was quite sure they were black. Her hair was dark and pretty thick.

"You don't think it was a wig?" he queried.

"Yes, I do believe it was!" declared my wife. "It always had a peculiar thick look about the part, just at the edge of her forehead. Oh, the miserable, shameful, deceitful thing! I hope you can find her and send her to prison."

"You see she has a good start. Her pals were on hand as soon as you were out of sight, and professionals like best articles that are almost sure to escape identification. Gold and silver can be melted, and the few articles of clothing have no distinct character. They are too sharp to leave the city immediately, so we will have the best known haunts watched. If there is the least word, you shall hear immediately."



"How would it do to offer a reward?" I ventured.

"They are not to be caught in that way," and he laughed. "If it were papers or bonds you might stand a better chance. I think I will make inquiries in the street if any parties were seen."

Alas! No one had dreamed of such a thing. Somebody imagined that a carriage stopped for a few moments, but the matter remained shrouded in mystery. Elizabeth went into violent hysterics, and I called in our next door neighbor. About noon I succeeded in getting some breakfast, and then I started for Ned Bromley's without delay, where I detailed the woes of this most unlucky Christmas morning. Did Kitty know of any reliable, tidy woman who could come in for a week or two, until matters were a little more settled.

She thought a few moments, then sent Ned off with a little note, while she went on with her dinner preparations.

"This woman is a widow, and goes out nursing, but just now she is not busy, and I think Mrs. Stryker may need something more than a mere servant after such a shock. And what a dreadful loss!" declared sympathizing Kitty.

Did I really regret them so much? I was shocked at my hardness of heart, my apathetical cruelty. Those fatal wedding gifts had plunged me into kindred extravagances at every step. I felt sure that we would have been better off without them. And now that they were



really gone, for I knew in my heart that we should never see them again, we might descend to a simpler style of living, with less pain and mortification.

Ned returned presently, with a plain, motherly sort of woman, to whom my heart warmed at once. She would go with me if I desired it, and so I said a rather lugubrious good-bye to Kitty and the children, and started homeward with my prize.

I found Elizabeth in bed, surrounded by a group of admiring women. She was a heroine, and had a story. She was a trusting, confiding, unsuspecting woman, and had been betrayed by the blackest and foulest treachery. She had taken the utmost care to look after references, and all that, but who could suspect such a deep-laid scheme! She never could trust to appearances again, for Joanna's honest-looking face, and tidy ways, had covered the most diabolical hypocrisy!

Every woman, I believe, had some story of misplaced confidence to relate. I inducted Mrs. Cox into the mysteries of the kitchen, and found the range fire nearly out, and that our Christmas turkey had been carried off, to grace the family silver, doubtless. There was part of a cold ham, and some steak, and a generous provision of mince pie. At six o'clock I sat down to my solitary dinner, the table being ornamented with the kitchen service of plated silver. I began to realize the extent of our loss. To replace it would be impossible. Elizabeth would spend the rest of her days bemoaning it.



My poor wife was really ill the next day. Mrs. Cox proved a capable and kindly woman, and I do not think my household affairs were ever so economically administered as during the three weeks she was with us.

I took occasion, two days after Christmas, to call on our house agent, and give up the house, in the most positive manner possible. "It will be of no avail to visit Mrs. Stryker," I announced, with what I intended for withering scorn, "for no offer of any kind would induce us to stay."

"The house is a desirable one, and can be easily rented," the man remarked, with the utmost sang-froid.

"Put up your bill as soon as you like," returned I, striding out of the door.

For now I felt that it must be immediate retrenchment. Debts and borrowed money had gone on accumulating, and now that the cause of grandeur was removed, there was no further necessity of keeping up idle state.

If I could only dispose of that huge sideboard and the safe, and if that great bedroom suite had never been bestowed upon Elizabeth !

I found during the month of January that our business had not been as prosperous through the year, and that a rather disastrous Southern failure would swallow up our surplus.

"Times look rather squally ahead," said Mr. Trask. "Some of the best firms are going on with fear and trembling. We have been living too fast ; indulging in



too many luxuries ; making too many wants. There has been too much of this credit business ; too much speculating and haste to be rich. Men who are out of debt may be able to stand the pressure, but the others will go like a row of card-board houses."

There was nothing then toward paying my debts but what I could save out of my income. And how to get the matter properly explained to Elizabeth puzzled me.

Two events happened, fortunately for me, that diverted her attention. One was the arrival of Rose Muldoon. A tall, rather plain, capable looking girl, respectful without being obsequious, dressed in a tidy manner, with no flounces or furbelows, sensible, and really well educated. She would like the place, she thought, from Lucy's description, and she hoped she would suit well enough to remain. She did not even object to doing the cooking until we could get suited in that respect.

The other was an astounding piece of news. The McFaddens had gone abroad in the dead of winter. Their horses and carriages had been sold privately ; their house was rented, furnished. And now it appeared that Mac had either sold his real estate or succeeded in mortgaging it to its full value, and there were whispers of numerous swindles put upon his beloved city. There were to be investigations and everything. But what of that ! Tim McFadden was out of the country with no one knew how much money, and his creditors were at



liberty to seize on his mortgaged real estate and indulge in unlimited profanity.

"I wouldn't have believed it of Laura!" sobbed Elizabeth. "And to think she was in here only three days before she sailed, and never said a word. I couldn't have treated any friend in such a shameful manner! I knew she meant to go to Paris sometime, and now she'll flaunt around in velvet and diamonds, and—"

"On other people's money," I appended, grimly, yet with a secret twinge of conscience.

"I never thought much of Tim McFadden, a great, burly, red-faced, ignorant, vulgar politician! I don't see how Laura could ever have married him, but she did dress magnificently, and had horses, and servants, and gave parties just when she liked. Oh, dear!" and Elizabeth wept afresh, whether in commiseration for them or herself, I could hardly tell.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

As if to give me ample time to reconsider, no bill was put on my house until the first day of February. I had been weakly putting off this bit of marital confidence, waiting, I suppose, for Elizabeth to recover from the shock of the robbery. When I returned home that evening and found it staring me in the face I knew the crisis must be met.



We had a new Bridget in our kitchen, but Miss Muldoon in a dignified way kept up a kindly supervision. She was an excellent manager, possessed good judgment and good common sense. She was expeditious and orderly, and I could see relieved Elizabeth of much care. True, when we thought of that miserable, deceitful wretch, Joanna, we hardly dared felicitate ourselves on our new treasure. She could alter dresses, and had made her mistresses' caps, and the children's bonnets in her old home, and Elizabeth pronounced her quite a genius. She was so quiet, too, not with the stealthiness that makes you nervous, but an air of refinement, as if she had been used to well-bred people.

As to our silver, we heard nothing of it. Two of our most expensive bronzes, and a number of parlor ornaments had been taken also. If they had only carried off some of the ugly pots and jars !

A wise French philosopher insists that the misfortunes of our friends are matters of genuine satisfaction to ourselves. There may have been people who rejoiced at our loss. I will not say there were, because we were warmly sympathized with—to our faces, and I, for one, cannot find it in my heart to doubt a friend's sincerity. But on the other hand, the many changes in our little circle would certainly make change easier for us. And the rapidity with which crashes occurred in the financial world, the fortune and state that was swept away with a breath, seemed appalling.



"Has the house agent been up here to-day?" I asked briskly, determining for once to take the bull by the horns.

"I do not know," replied Elizabeth, with a languid sigh. "I have seen no company to-day except Mrs. Lawrence. I really did not feel fit for the slightest exertion."

"He has put up a bill, I see. I gave the house up—I felt that we could not, that we ought not pay such a high rent, for business is desperately dull. Men are failing on every hand. — And rents *must* come down."

"I think you might have consulted me, Adolphus," said my wife, in a tremulous tone.

"But you know you declared that you should never feel safe in the house again. I thought you would rather go somewhere else," I replied, with a sudden inspiration.

"There *are* many painful associations connected with this house, it is true; and, Adolphus, I am not sure that it is a healthy house. I wish we could go to the country for the summer.

"And not keep house?"

"Well—yes. It would relieve me of so much care, and I am not strong. We could store the furniture, and then take a house in the fall. There is Rose—I should not want to give her up. Only—how we can ever find a house, and get moved, I do not see."

"Elizabeth, my darling," I said, "I feel that we



must make some new arrangements, that are—in short—less expensive. The future looks so—so precarious, and we do run behind—”

“Don’t distress me with business, Adolphus,” and my wife raised her hand imploringly. “You know I have often said you ought to do something outside of your business, or get into a more profitable one. But you never have paid any attention to my desires on the subject. Other men have made fortunes in speculations—”

“And some one loses, always. It is only another form of gambling,” I went on, in a high moral tone. “Besides, what do I know about longs and shorts, and bulls and bears, and calls and puts, and straddles? I should have been unlucky, I know, at the very first venture. And I never had any money to speculate with. You would hardly have liked me to embezzle the funds of the firm.”

“Don’t talk so dreadfully. I only know that other people have been lucky. But I don’t suppose it makes much difference whether I have anything or not. Indeed, I sometimes feel as if it did not matter at all. I may not need any house after a little ;” and she wiped her eyes.

The presentiment was very touching and pathetic, of course, but it did not strike terror to my very soul as in bygone times. Was I becoming a heartless monster?

However, I was glad to get over this matter of the



house so easily. And, in the course of a few weeks, another very desirable abode came to us. A friend had taken a row of new buildings under some sort of lien for material, and offered them to rent at fifteen hundred dollars. Mrs. Ennis, our next door neighbor, had taken one, and insisted that Elizabeth should go and look at them. It was a little farther up town, and not quite so stylish a neighborhood, but the houses were certainly very pretty. There was as much available room as in our present one, except that the parlor was divided into a music room or library at the back.

We discussed the pros and cons of boarding for the summer. There would be moving, and storing the furniture, and re-moving in the fall. Much of it would have to be boxed, and it might get injured, or moth-eaten, or harmed in some way. And since Elizabeth was pleased with the new house, and satisfied to go, I thought we might better settle ourselves and be through with the anxiety. The five hundred dollars we should save seemed almost a fortune to me.

Alas! Let no Benedick think he has seen trouble until he has moved his household goods and chattels. We were not to wait until the first day of May, as these houses stood empty, and there was no cleaning, for they were in perfect order. But for a week, I think, the house was filled with men and women, going and coming, carrying away carpets, bringing in boxes, clattering up and down, packing and instituting pande-



monium generally. The parlor looked like some great dry-goods warehouse.

The excitement quite roused Elizabeth. She seemed to come out of her long lethargy, and was once more her own brilliant self, giving orders and making plans. I found, rather to my chagrin, that she, too, was counting on the five hundred dollars we were to save in rent. We must have some NEW SILVER, uttered in very large capitals. And a new set of china was an urgent, absolute necessity.

"Why, we cannot set a decent table!" declared my wife. "Plated silver answered when the robbery was a new thing, and everybody was sympathizing with us; but now the interest of that is pretty well gone, and our friends will not be expecting to have it served up at every meal."

"I fancy our circle of friends will be much smaller," I said, with secret rejoicing. "The McFaddens—"

"Don't mention those odious people," said Elizabeth, with superb scorn. "Laura has not even written me a note, and McFadden was an atrocious swindler!"

"And the Hunts and the Du Vaux, who have been living on the money of their friends and neighbors—"

"It is terrible!" ejaculated my wife. "Mrs. Du Vaux' dress-making bill is nearly a thousand dollars, and the elegant furniture they had last spring had the merest trifle paid on it. Such people deserve to have a



downfall!" and my wife was the picture of virtuous indignation.

"Changes are so frequent now that it seems to me this inflated style of living must come to an end," I said seriously.

"I hope you do not think *we* ever were inflated, Adolphus?" and my wife gazed at me reproachfully. "I must say for our antecedents we have lived very, very simply. All our nicest things were my wedding gifts, and now they are gone, and I don't suppose I will ever have anything again. Adolphus, you are very thoughtless to so harrow up one's feelings!" and her handkerchief was pressed to her eyes.

"My dear, I had no intention; I did not mean—"

"You are so careless of any one's nerves! When I am in my grave you will think of these things, Adolphus! I only hope your conscience will not upbraid you bitterly. I do not possess a vindictive disposition I am thankful to say, or I might—" but the rest was lost in a sob.

I soothed my wife with vague promises which I was rather afraid I should not be able to fulfil, but peace demands sacrifices, as all great treaties have proved.

Monday was the first day of May, but we decided to go the Thursday before, Friday being considered unlucky. I engaged my men; two great drays with fine strong horses, and two stalwart men to each team. Five dollars a load did not appear exorbitant to me, since they



promised to take everything up and down, and put it just where it would need to stay.

Bridget, whose month was up the day before, had left us very unceremoniously. She "had never lived with a family who moved," she said, "and she didn't believe she should like it, and then she had found a nice place where her cousin was laundress, and she'd have no washing nor ironing to do." True, there were thirteen in family, but she did not appear to mind that trifling offset. Our new comer was strong and cheerful, but very ignorant.

We were in the midst of breakfast when our movers descended upon us. The parlor furniture being so well boxed and packed would go first, and be stored as closely as possible in the parlor of the new house ; so two loads were dispatched very expeditiously. When they were out of the way I began at the bedsteads, several of which were still standing. Closets were full of everything ; indeed it seemed to me now that nothing had been done.

The twelve labors of Hercules may be a myth, but I doubt it. Greek and Etruscan and Egyptian and Pompeian pottery may be classical, but one can forgive the tempers of those early ages when one has packed it. I ran up and down ; I handled over enough articles to start a museum or stock a house-furnishing store. I worked ; I tugged ; I perspired, and it was not a warm day either. I shouted myself hoarse, and candor com-



pels me to add that I lost my temper, but nothing in this world is so easily found again.

By noon we had made some impression. Now it was decided that the kitchen things should go, and Miss Muldoon accompany my wife around to the new domicile. I think I felt easier in my mind when they were out of the way. And now came the tug of war. It had been a work of strength and strategy to get Elizabeth's elegant sideboard in the dining-room, and now it was to be taken out. I proposed that the carved top should be unscrewed first of all, but the men were slightly beery and obstinate, and persisted in carrying it as far as the doorway, when they became convinced. One man swore roundly at the folly of having such furniture to move about, and I echoed his sentiments with my whole heart. Yet I gave them many charges concerning it.

While they were gone I sat down amid the ruins, Marius-like, and drew a long breath. "What idiotic folly," said I to myself, "possesses people to move! I had viewed it before in an economical light; now I turned it over as a subject of philosophy. It certainly was an old and established custom. The Patriarchs moved with their flocks and herds, wives and children; but these could walk. Tents could be folded up, raiment—they certainly did have changes of raiment, and household goods, but I doubted if sideboards, pianos and bedsteads eight feet high had been invented. Nay, now that I had strayed among Biblical times, I remembered that Adam



and Eve had moved, in rather a compulsory fashion, to be sure, but here our woe began. Fortunate for them that, if happen it must, it took place at so early a period of their housekeeping. As the trampling of men and horses broke on my ear I roused myself from my reverie and mentally subscribed to one clause of the Westminster Catechism.

They loaded again, but still there was something left. I glanced around in dismay. Had furniture some mysterious gift of re-duplicating itself by processes not yet understood, and again resuming its rightful proportions? I began to believe in those uncanny household elves, who played the mischief with honest souls in by-gone times. Indeed, I was in that desperate state where I could believe anything.

“There’ll be about one load more,” said the head carman, with a diabolically cheerful smile.

Elizabeth had charged me to go carefully over the house, and search every closet for articles that might have been overlooked. I did my duty in a rigorous fashion. I peered into every cranny and corner, I shook out every crumpled paper, I brought all the smaller articles down to the parlor, I stuffed the furnace and range full of rubbish, and could have performed an Indian war dance around the blaze. I am not sure but that I could have burned up the house with the greatest equanimity, and, like Nero, fiddled over the ruins. It is well there



are strong safeguards to society, or in some unguarded moment a man might become a savage.

At length the last thing was out. I barred the windows, bolted the door, slipped the latch-key in my pocket, and, hailing a car, was soon transported to our new street. A brisk walk of a square and a half, brought me face to face with a much-littered sidewalk and a wide-open hall door.

If it had been confusion in the old place, what was it in the new? Chaos come again, surely!

"Will you settle the bill now?" inquired the most sober of the four men.

I had provided for this emergency, and boldly answered in the affirmative.

He took out a pocket inkstand and a printed blank, which he soon filled and handed to me.

"Sixty-five dollars!" I exclaimed, amazed at the man's assurance.

"Why—yes. The bargain was five dollars a load. There have been thirteen loads. Six times going double, and once single;" and he stated the fact with the air of one who knows he cannot be gainsaid.

Five dollars a load looked moderate. A large dray, with two horses and two men—you could not reasonably expect them to go for less. But sixty-five dollars was quite another view of the case.

However, I paid it, like a well-disposed citizen. I could not say that I had been swindled. I marched



down to the basement where Elizabeth sat, the picture of grief. Cheerful Rose Muldoon was bustling about and making the place look homelike. Kate was unpacking barrels and boxes, and putting the articles into a kind of dresser closet, built along one side of the kitchen.

"Look at that!" exclaimed Elizabeth, waving her hand tragically toward the adjoining room. "That elegant sideboard is a ruin. Adolphus, those men were drunk! yes, absolutely drunk! if I must use such a disgusting term. And the headboard to my lovely bedstead, dear uncle Von Trump's gift, is in the same plight. When they had it almost up stairs they let it fall. I thought the whole house was coming down. It seems to me that the least you could have done would have been to choose sober carmen!"

"My dear," I said rather testily, I must confess, "I did not think it necessary to inquire into the moral character of these men. We had no silver to be purloined, and really, how could I prevent their taking a glass or two of beer?"

"And you can make light of it, Adolphus. But it is all of a piece. I did not want to move. I was very well satisfied where we were, and I would not have lost Bridget for a good deal. And now see the result. I hope you are satisfied."

I knew I was a monster of heartlessness, but I had had neither lunch nor dinner, and it is difficult for a



man to practice the cardinal virtues on an empty stomach. However, I walked into the dining-room, and surveyed the ruins pointed out by my wife. Then I sauntered up stairs.

It seemed to me that every readily accessible spot was blocked up with the most incongruous articles of furniture. The second floor was filled full of things that should have gone up stairs. It was the most curious conglomerate I had ever seen. How would it ever get reduced to order? I felt sick at heart, and yet, as Elizabeth had said, it was all my doing. I had moved!

We had something to eat that evening about dusk, I remember, set out on the kitchen table. We could have no gas. I had not thought of giving notice, so Rose went to the nearest grocery and purchased some candles. By their dim light, and with her assistance, I put up two bedsteads, and she spread the beds in a most tempting manner. I was thankful to tumble into mine, and, though I heard from Elizabeth some distressful sighs, I am ashamed to say that I fell asleep almost immediately.

The carpets came home the next day, and a man to tack them down. Then we began to settle in good earnest. Furniture was placed, trunks and boxes were unpacked, and I gained courage to take a survey of the Von Trump bedstead. It certainly was a ruin. One of the polished panels was split, and the carving scattered



as hopelessly as the ills in Pandora's box, and, like them, could never be gathered again. The only thing I saw in the way of remedy was to have an entirely new headboard made, but I did not dare suggest this to Elizabeth as yet.

On Saturday I went down to business. I had had enough moving for a lifetime.

How we could have lived through it but for Miss Muldoon's cheerful presence, good common sense, and that admirable quality which leads one to make the best of things, I hardly know. Elizabeth ended by taking to her bed. In one respect it made matters easier, for our handmaiden had only to go ahead in her own fashion, which was a very good one, I must say.

By some inadvertence our safe had been taken down into the basement. We had nothing to put in it, and the thing was hateful to my sight. I offered it to a friend for half of what it cost me, and, after some haggling, and a little further reduction in the price, he took it. We found our sideboard was too large for the corner in which it must stand, so Elizabeth proposed that we should sell it to a second-hand dealer, and buy a new one. Although not an economical arrangement, I thought it best not to dissent. Then I made my suggestion about the bedstead.

"I've been thinking about something else," said Elizabeth, with rather languid hesitation. "It was dear uncle Von Trump's gift, to be sure—" (I had paid



for it myself), "and he is dead, but those great fussy things are going out of style, and that lovely Eastlake furniture is coming in. I should so like to have a set. I should think of poor uncle just the same, but the new set would be prettier and nicer, for that carving always did catch so much dust. Rose thinks it a great trouble to take care of. And since you insisted upon my moving here, Adolphus, quite against my will, it seems as if you ought to do something in return."

"My dear," I began slowly—

"Do not be so cruel as to refuse me, Adolphus ; if you do it will be the last thing I shall ever ask, and when you see me fading before your eyes—"

With that Elizabeth began to sob softly.

"My dear," I essayed again, "you did not give me a chance to reply. The idea was so new that I had to think a moment, and really, if you *do* desire it, I suppose it would be as well."

That was quite a diplomatic speech. Elizabeth came and bent over the back of my chair, kissed me, and called me a darling, and peace was restored.

We sold the suite, what was left of it, for one hundred dollars, and our new Eastlake cost three hundred more in exchange. But by the first of June we had come to comparative order. True, now and then, some lost article that Elizabeth was sure I had left in the old house turned up in the most unlikely and incongruous place, but Rose always smoothed out troubles and difficul-



ties, and kept the household wheels in the right grooves.

We began to like the house very much. It was new and free from vermin, and the back parlor was taken for a library, an arrangement that pleased me much, and that Elizabeth found very convenient.

I scrutinized my accounts, rather startled at the result. Moving, sixty-five dollars ; taking up carpets, cleaning and putting them down again, fifty-two ; extra help, breakages and repairs, thirty-seven ; difference in the new sideboard, seventy ; in the Eastlake set, three hundred ; a total of five hundred and twenty-five. The difference in the rent was very fully made up. We had gained a little in comfort, and, perhaps, it might be owing to new pipes and fixtures, but the gas bills certainly were not as large.

In one respect I had lost ground. I was no longer master of the situation. Every unpleasant and uncomfortable event that happened was laid to my desire for moving, and I felt certain that if at any time during the next ten years I should come down with small pox, Elizabeth would blame it to this particular house. If any extra expense was to be incurred this unfortunate moving was invoked to be godfather to it all. Seeking to recover lost ground was fatal. I simply gave up, but never admitted it to Elizabeth.

Our friends congratulated us—a pleasant and harmless piece of politeness, but we bought our new silver for



ourselves. Most of that was plated—I did not mean to offer a premium on thievery again. Elizabeth objected strenuously, but as I told her the Von Trumps and the McFaddens and the Gilseys and many others had fallen out of our sphere by losses and failures, and in one or two instances by enormous defalcations. Times were getting worse. Trade was falling off everywhere. Ours was a solid old house to be sure, but there was not much look to increase one's income. And now I began to feel afraid of speculating. More than one nice fellow that I knew had been cornered in stocks when everything seemed most promising, and in several instances the money lost was a friend's or his employer's. I had nothing to risk unless I used the credit of the firm; and forgery, as I explained to my wife one evening, had a rather ugly look, and seldom reflected credit upon a man.

How could I ever get out of debt? How *did* people economize? What grand secret did Kitty Bromley possess that they could live on so much smaller income, and lay up money?

June came in very hot, and Elizabeth was not well. A summer in the city could hardly be thought of by even the most brutal and miser-like husband, and I surely was not that. But where could my wife go? I mean where could I afford to send her?

Fate decided it, by sending honest, laughing Joe Walton up one day. He made Longport look so tempting that Elizabeth said, "My dear Adolphus, I think I



will go down for a month. You can shut up the house and come every Saturday. Kate is getting so saucy she would have to be discharged, and Rose would like to go with me."

So that was settled.

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## CHAPTER IX.

INSTEAD of one month, Elizabeth spent two at Longport. There was nothing much to be afraid of in the house, so I used to shut it up Saturday morning with a clear conscience, and start at two for cousin Walton's. They lived on the south side, and the station was a mile off, but Elizabeth would drive over for me, sometimes in the buggy, when we would have a cosy tête-à-tête; at others in the big carriage, with Dora and some of the children. I must not omit to mention that Elizabeth brought the cat along, our pretty Maltie, who was very fond of its mistress. Dora was like a little picture, with her sun-browned, laughing face, her merry, teasing ways, and she and Elizabeth struck up quite a friendship. Then, in August, Joe insisted upon bringing the whole Bromley household down for a fortnight, and I took a vacation. I don't think I had enjoyed anything so much since—well, since I had been married, at all events. I gained in flesh, and Elizabeth certainly was handsomer



than ever before. She and Kitty had many mysterious confidences. I was pleased to see them so cordial, but why should they always stop talking when I came in sight, and put on that unconcerned, innocent look, as if they had merely been making some harmless remark about the moon? I am sure I was neither jealous nor tyrannical.

The pleasure came to an end, however. I had saved a little money, and felt quite elated. Moreover, we took home with us a rather elderly widow, who did us the favor to accept the place of cook, and who agreed very well with Rose, our treasure.

She came home first, and swept and garnished the house. Letty Cann and Elizabeth followed, and, I must say, we really came to the pleasure of living. Such breakfasts as Mrs. Cann managed to get at precisely half-past seven, such princely dinners, and oh, such moderate butchers' and grocers' bills. I used to calm my jubilant spirits by thinking of our peerless Joanna and her unkindly ending, and wondering what would happen to Mrs. Cann. Her husband had gone on a sea voyage some five years previous, and never returned, but I made sure that he would now. It was not in the history of human felicity that a man should be happy for weeks together.

I noticed, too, that Kitty Bromley was down quite often. I seldom saw her, but Elizabeth would speak of her running in with evident pleasure. They were out



shopping together, too, though my wife seemed quite disinclined to give any account of the proceedings.

"Did you get a new dress?" I ventured to inquire.

"N-o-o," with evident reluctance.

"Or a new bonnet? Are bonnets dear this season?"

I asked with assumed interest, as I wanted Elizabeth to feel that her pleasure was mine.

"No; I am just going to have my velvet done over. It will answer for all my going out this winter," was the brief reply.

I stared. Had Kitty Bromley really managed to induct Elizabeth into the science of economical dressing? What could she have bought with the seventy-five dollars I gave her!

Then I remembered a story of a loving and dutiful wife who hid her savings week by week in the family Bible, and when misfortune overtook her husband, and all was swept away, she brought out the precious book, and falling on her knees before him, besought him to look over its pages, and he found sufficient to give him a fresh start in life. Did Elizabeth mean to imitate this heroic woman, and help me pay my debt incurred through the fatal generosity of wedding gifts! My heart beat with unwonted emotion, and I could not forbear kissing her tenderly.

Strange to relate, a few weeks after, she wanted to go shopping again. Kitty was coming down, and would spend the day. Could I let her have fifty dollars?



"What do you want to get?" I asked. "It surely cannot be wedding presents. Most of our friends seem to be married, and their children are not quite grown up."

"You think you are very witty, Adolphus," said my wife, with lofty severity.

"And you had seventy-five dollars—"

"I declare, Adolphus, it is too bad! Here I have gone without a new dress or anything this winter, and have given only two little tea parties, and been taken to only one opera, just one, with all the lovely stars that have been here, and two or three times to the theatre, and not a single ball, or crush party, and you can grudge me a poor paltry fifty dollars! I expect you'll ask me to keep account of every paper of pins, and spool of thread and piece of tape, and give you back the change. I never did think you were going to turn into such a tyrant, Adolphus, or I wouldn't have married you, and what you will be when you get old—for miserly habits always grow upon one—and I have heard of people who went without light, and fire, and—and—"

Here Elizabeth's feelings overcame her and she burst into a flood of tears.

"My dear—" I said in mild consternation.

"You'll think of all this, Adolphus, when I am gone," she returned, solemnly. "You will remember how you made me pack up and move when I hadn't the strength of a mouse, and how everything was broken and jammed, and that I have never had a well day since."



"Here is the fifty dollars, and I don't want the change back," I said, magnanimously. "My dear, can't you stand a little bit of teasing?"

"*Were* you really teasing, Adolphus? And you will not ask me anything about the money, or what I bought?"

"Not a word. Spend it all in penny trumpets if you like."

"Oh, you dear Adolphus!" and she blushed and laughed, and I thought again of the family Bible.

On the whole she was pretty fair. I had never found her so willing to give up parties, and, though she had had spells two or three times in the middle of the coldest nights, I ran for the doctor cheerfully.

She proposed we should have all the Bromleys to spend Christmas with us, and I was delighted. She even wondered if old aunt and uncle Berrian, from Kingsbridge, would not come, and insisted I should go in person to see. The old people were much pleased, but declined the invitation on account of their being feeble, and sent quantities of love to my wife.

We had a magnificent Christmas. Letty Cann's dinner was fit for a king. Kitty and Elizabeth went up stairs, while Ned and I played blind man's buff, puss in the corner, and sundry other games with the children, who shrieked with laughter, and Letty crowned the feast by making them hickory-nut candy. I really felt like a boy again after all the frolic.



The last day of the old year, which happened to be Saturday, I was hurrying through some accounts to get everything straightened up, when a telegram was handed me, a summons to return home without delay. I seized my hat and great coat, and muttered something quite unintelligible to Mr. Trask, rushed out of the door, and hailed the first street car, which went at a snail's pace, I thought.

I found matters in the wildest confusion. Elizabeth knew she could not live. Would I go at once for Kitty Bromley, and stop on my way at some number East 17th street—it was in her right hand bureau drawer—a card of Mrs. Bailey, and be sure to stop there first, and hurry home to receive her dying breath, and—

“Go as quickly as you can,” said Rose Muldoon’s low, quiet voice.

I started off, and had to come back for the card, which was not in the bureau, but Rose exhumed it, by some strange legerdemain. Mrs. Bailey I saw in person, a tall, dressy, severe, opinionated person, who did not evince the slightest surprise or ask a question, but said, impressively, as if she had been the Delphian oracle, “I will come.”

Kitty was out doing errands, but I waited and brought her along. The oracle had just come in a cab, with a large trunk, and was disputing fares with a cabman, who was in the right. I paid the sum myself, and she swept up the stairs with a scowl.



On Sunday morning, soon after sunrise, Elizabeth made me the proud father of a little son. Mother and child were doing well. I was hustled off up to the third floor with the important comment that everything depended upon quiet, and that Mrs. Stryker must not be disturbed. Indeed, this absurd edict was kept up until Tuesday evening, when I was allowed to glance at Elizabeth through the partly open door, as she lay surrounded by ruffled pillows, and inspect a bundle of flannel with a very red face, no nose to speak of, and an inch or two of black Indian scalp-lock, with the remark that it was the very picture of myself, and a boy to be proud of. My heart swelled with triumph. I wondered if it did not need something in the way of clothes, or toys, or—when it set up a shriek, and Mrs. Bailey looked as if she longed to annihilate me on the spot.

That woman staid four weeks, and if she had remained two days more, I am convinced that I must have sought shelter on the warmest side of the chimney, trusting myself to the tender mercies of the tin roof. She seemed to begrudge me the food I ate, the clothes I wore, the very stairs that I went up and down. I could not read in the library; it disturbed Mrs. Stryker. I went about tip-toe up stairs, and many a night it kept my wife from sleeping until two or three in the morning. When I ventured to suggest that I was in bed by ten, Mrs. Bailey insisted it must have been my snoring. I, who never had been accused of such a thing by the



wife of my bosom. Was there not another room I could take? and she had the hardihood to prepose the sofa in the dining-room, looking as if I might be thankful she had not mentioned the station house or the Tombs. Husbands, in her opinion, were the cruelest, selfishest (I give her own adjectives), miserablest, deceitfulest beings on the face of the earth. She wondered how women lived at all. She would not be tempted to marry again if a man was made of gold.

"She might cut slices off of him," suggested Rose Muldoon, pithily. "He would be quite unable to resist."

I paid her forty-eight dollars for four weeks services, called a cab, and Mrs. Bailey went away with her trunk. I felt curious to know what was in it, for she had worn one black silk dress the whole month.

I found Elizabeth down at the dinner-table when I came home that day, looking uncommonly well, I thought. I kissed her fondly, and expressed my surprise.

"I'm so glad that horrid old thing's gone. I'll never have her again, never!" cried Elizabeth, decisively. "The Vandewaters think there is no one like Mrs. Bailey."

"I don't believe there is, my dear," I interrupted.

"But as it was the first time, I needed an experienced nurse, and the doctor thought I could not do better; but oh! she was dreadful! However, she took good care of me, and baby; and you've hardly seen him,



Adolphus ! I'm sorry you do not like babies, but I always thought them a bore until now, and he's the darlingest, dinktiest, daintiest, sweetest—"

"Who told you I didn't like babies," I inquired, fiercely.

"Why—nurse. She said you *never* wanted to see him ;" and Elizabeth looked reproachfully at me.

"Then she—lied ! She would never let me come in."

"That is too funny !" and Elizabeth laughed. "She pretends to think husbands dreadful, but if no one married where would her twelve dollars a week come from ? And I dare say she tried to set you up against me ?" and my wife looked inquiringly.

"No, she was true to her sex," I replied.

We had a merry feast, and then I took my wife up stairs on my arm, and inspected my son in his cradle, who seemed to have bleached out, to have grown, and to look quite like a human being.

"He's had the red gum and the jaundice ; that makes him look white, but oh, Adolphus, if he should ever get the croup, or scarlet fever, or measles or mumps, or be bitten by some nasty Spitz dog, or get stolen like Charley Ross, what should we do !" and Elizabeth began to cry.

I comforted my dear wife. I sat by my own grate fire and came back to the rights and privileges of my own house. I brought down my shirts and collars and socks, and put them in my own bureau drawer. I hung up my coats and pantaloons in my own wardrobe, and last of



all put my best boots in the bath-room closet. I was a happy man that night.

The baby throve and grew, and had innumerable callers and gifts. I thought him rather pretty ; much prettier than many babies I had seen. He was fairly good too, sleeping all night and seldom crying. But the next great puzzle was what to name him.

"What is your old uncle's name, Adolphus ?" asked my wife.

"Nicholas. Nicholas Berrian," I answered.

"That sounds rather stylish."

"But if you were called uncle Nickey, or even old Nick ?"

"Oh, good gracious !" cried Elizabeth.

"I'd like something plain and pretty—short."

"It must be Adolphus for one name. We may never have another son," she said in a solemn tone. "And there ought to be some distinctive family name. How would it do to take mine ? Adolphus V. T. Stryker ? Now, that has a certain air," and she held her head in a stately poise.

"We shall have to call him Dolph, and school boys will call him Dolph, and odd trump, or old trump or trump card, they are such torments. I used to wish in my boyhood that I had been called John after my father."

"I don't believe I could have made up my mind to marry you then," said my wife, simply.

I inclined to Edward or Joseph, but Elizabeth did not



seem to favor these. Various were the names we tried on, and that were given by friends, many the discussions, some of which candor compels me to state were rather heated. Elizabeth bought his christening robe, appointed a day, asked in some friends. Ned Bromley was to be his godfather. What should we do about a name!

The eventful morning came, and we renewed our vain efforts. I think Elizabeth still had a leaning toward Adolphus Von Trump, but I was resolved to stand out stoutly. Surely a man had some rights in so important a thing as the name of his son.

"Adolphus," said my wife, laying aside for a moment her argumentative tone, "I wish you would stop as you go down town and leave these orders. Now don't forget. And be sure to come home early."

I scribbled names over the ledger that day, and mis-directed several envelopes. I longed for, yet dreaded the hour of my return to the bosom of my family. But it came like most other exigencies in this life, and brought with it strength to meet the fatal moment. I let myself in with my latch key, and assumed a firm bearing and a proud step.

There was a buzz in the parlor, and a rustle of feminine garments. Anastasia Germain, one of Elizabeth's high art friends, a really fine water colorist, whom she had picked out for Van Bricklebach, was to be god-mother. She was a very nice, pleasant girl of about twenty-four. There was Kitty and two or three others,



and Elizabeth had just been filling an old-fashioned silver bowl, out of which some princess had once been christened, with water from the river Jordan, that some travelled friend had sent her. She was explaining where Kitty and Miss Germain were to stand ; and then they all rushed up stairs, and some more women came, and several gentlemen.

I hurried into my best clothes, parted my hair straight in the back, scented my handkerchief, gave one last twitch to my cravat, and was ready. There was my son with a trail of lace, and puffs, and needlework, and Heaven only knows what all. The black Indian scalp lock had fallen out of the top of his head, and in its place had come a kind of fuzz with a suspiciously red look ; but his eyes were large and dark blue—very handsome, I thought. He was fat and fair, and just now appeared supremely good-humored.

“What is the name to be ?” asked some one.

Elizabeth and I glanced up simultaneously, and my natural candor compels me to say that we eyed each other in a rather belligerent fashion. There was an ominous silence.

“Have n’t you really named him ?” and the laugh, though pleasant, had an aggravating sound.

“I think the eldest son ought always to be named for his father. Family names proclaim good blood at once,” was Elizabeth’s incisive comment.

“But mine is not a family name,” I returned, with



much warmth. "My mother took it from an old novel. It was the terror of my boyhood, and the butt of my schoolmates, although it answers for a man. Then, to have an old Adolphus and a young Adolphus in the family—"

"We could call him by his middle name," suggested Elizabeth, with lofty dignity.

"He has no middle name," said I, severely.

"Dr. Lightwood has come," was the next announcement.

"Elizabeth!"

"Mr. Stryker!"

A cold perspiration came out on my forehead. Was I to give in and let my little son go down to posterity as Adolphus Von Trump Stryker? That sweet, innocent little mortal; what had he done to deserve such a fate?

"Mr. Stryker, the clergyman is waiting," said Elizabeth, with overwhelming dignity and in a freezing tone.

My courage was oozing out of my finger ends. Either I must give in, or we must have a scene before our guests, who were looking on with wondering interest. My wife had a firmness of character that I am well convinced would have made her a heroine of history if she had lived in some previous century. I have sometimes regretted that the century lost so much.

"My dear—" and there I paused, staring wildly around, but I could have clutched my hair in my des-



peration, except that I had succeeded in getting it arranged just to my liking.

"What name have you to suggest?" said my wife, with that awful blandness, a sure precursor of a woman's victory.

"Did you ever think of Laurence? it was your mother's maiden name, you know, and I always thought it so beautiful," said Kitty Bromley, coming to the rescue.

"No, I have not," and I glanced at my wife, who was tragic enough for Norma. Would she be willing to call her son after her mother-in-law? That lovely and sweet tempered personage was dead, to be sure.

"And my mother's maiden name was Wayne," declared Elizabeth, with a strangely joyous accent and much pride. "Laurence Wayne Stryker! Now doesn't that fit together nicely? Adolphus, I do not see why you couldn't have thought of it before, instead of your silly Eugenes and Ernests!"

I do not think I had ever mentioned them.

"If it wasn't for you, Kitty, I don't believe the baby would have been named at all. Men are no dependence whatever in such matters. Laurence Wayne, my precious darling!" and she kissed the baby rapturously. "Let us go down."

I understood then how new and unknown men slip into the Presidential chair. Both parties dispute and quarrel until every available man has been fought ont,



and the combatants tired of the warfare. In whips some one with a new man, and, presto ! the thing is settled.

We marched down stairs, and our little son was made Laurence Wayne beyond a peradventure. He was extremely good, I must say, and had four silver cups given him, three teaspoons, and one fork. Mr. Trask had presented me with a check for fifty dollars when he was but a week old, and fancy dry-goods of all kinds had been showered upon him by doating feminines.

We had a nice little feast, and Elizabeth was gracious as a queen. Just as we were going to bed that night, however, she took occasion to say : “ Adolphus, how you *did* act this afternoon ! I never was so mortified in all my life. People will think you treat me like a—a—slave ! Yes, that is just it ! Denying me the privilege of naming my own child ! ”

“ But you are—pleased—suited ? ” I inquired, hesitatingly.

“ Suited ! There is no credit due *you*, Adolphus ! ” in withering scorn. “ You would have been glad to have your son go down to the grave nameless, and had the guests and the clergyman here under false pretences. Yes, my darling ! ” bending over the cradle, “ but for good, sweet Kitty Bromley, who has a mother’s heart, you might have answered to that hideously common name, John ! ” and Elizabeth began to weep.

We made peace at last, and the price on my part was a new black silk dress, with velvet sleeves and trim-



mings, some Duchesse lace, and six new pairs of kid gloves.

"For you know I have not had a thing in nearly a year," sobbed my charmer, with her head on my shoulder, "and I have tried to be so economical, for I knew how much it cost to move, Adolphus; and some wives would have thrown that up to you, continually, for I was very well suited, and knew we couldn't save anything by the change, but you would have your own way."

"Elizabeth," I answered, solemnly, "I am an obstinate, pig-headed, opinionated, self-willed donkey!"

After which concession, we kissed each other and fell asleep sweetly.

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## CHAPTER X.

AND now, I said to myself, for my boy's sake, I must make every effort to get out of debt. Alas! so easy to resolve, so hard to execute. I could not grumble about the manner in which household affairs were carried on—it seemed as though we had never enjoyed such an immunity from worry. Letty and Rose were household angels. Elizabeth was a very devoted mother, it seemed to me, only, if we should have six children, and all equally expensive, ruin would stare me in the face. Old



Mr. Trask seemed to take a great interest in me, and be proud of my business career, in that I had let severely alone all kinds of stock speculating. He did not know it was because I had no courage to venture. I felt mean in my own eyes to take the credit for principle and rectitude, and when he praised me for living within my means, and hinted that no doubt I had saved a little, I could hardly keep the tell-tale color out of my face.

One evening, late in April, Ned Bromley dropped in with his cheerful greeting.

"Hillo! old fellow!" he said, gaily, "let's walk up a bit. I have some plans to talk over, and don't want to confide them to my neighbors in the horse car."

"All right!" I returned. "It is just the evening for walking. You haven't had a fortune left you, Ned? You look so jubilant."

"No. We may all get two or three hundred apiece when poor old uncle Nickey dies," and he laughed gaily. "Adolphus, I think I shall buy a house. I want you to go out in Jersey with me to-morrow to look at it. It has been offered to me at less than it cost, and it is my ideal, there! Kitty and I have taken one look at it, and she's wild to go."

"How does such a bargain fall into your hands?" I asked, with a twinge of envy.

"O, Chetworth is in lots of trouble. I am afraid there is something more than he owns to, though, really, I have no right to suspect. But he's caught now with



a lot of property on his hands, and *that* is tumbling down like a row of card houses. He has been raising money on mortgages. It seems foolish to me to pay out so much for interest all the time, but I think men have been wild on the subject. Real estate isn't any surer than anything else. Well, now he is compelled to sell. There is a mortgage coming due on this house in July, and he cannot meet it, so he wants to sell before that time and realize all he can."

"Look out that you don't get into trouble," I advised sagely. "What is it like?"

"Suburban, of course. On the outskirts of N—, forty-minutes from New York, five from the railroad station, with horse cars but a few blocks off; one hundred feet front by three hundred deep, the house standing back from the street about thirty feet, pretty lawn, with shrubbery, garden, and quantities of fruit, and a cosy, lovely house. He built it for his wife. About three weeks ago he tried to sell it at auction, and there was only one bid, from a real estate dealer, for five thousand dollars."

"And he asks—how much?"

"Seven thousand. The house cost eight, and the lot one thousand when he bought it. Street graded, flagged, water and gas, just as complete as possible. It could be built more cheaply now, prices have gone down so, but, on the other hand, they have frescoed the walls, improved the grounds, built a fine hennery and small



barn, which would count up another thousand. The thing is, it exactly suits. When you build it takes some time for fruit to grow."

"What terms can you make?"

"The four thousand is to be paid down. Then, I will have to look out for the mortgage in July."

"Can you do that?"

"We have, Kitty and I together—I give her a house-keeping allowance, you know, and what she saves is hers—just thirty-seven hundred dollars. Now, 'Dolph, I hate to say it, but there is no use beating about the bush, if you could let me have a little sum, and the rest in July, unless it pinches you too very much—"

"Yes," I said, rather huskily.

"I hate to ask it, old chap, and would not under any other circumstances, but when you see the place, you'll say it's too good to let slip. You will go to-morrow, sure. Kitty was bound I should not decide until you had seen it."

I promised. Then Ned branched into an eloquent description of rooms, and closets, and halls, and grape-vines, pear and fruit trees, asparagus and strawberry beds, raspberries and Lawtons, until I felt more envious than before.

I entered my own house with a sigh. Elizabeth sat in the nursery with Rose and the sleeping babe. After the gas was lighted, I betook myself to the library. I had made some headway with my debts. Except a few



trifling items, it was in one sum, two thousand dollars, due Ned Bromley, with half yearly interest in July. I had been married now almost three years and a half, and part of this sum, nay, about all, was for our house furnishing. And on a less salary, Ned had saved up almost enough to buy him a house, taking care of his wife and three children. I groaned inwardly at the contrast.

However, the money must be raised. It would never do to disappoint so good a friend, and make Ned no end of trouble. But how and where? Money was hard to get. Each man distrusted his neighbor. I had a life policy for two thousand. I could raise something on that, but I had one bitter experience of borrowing, and shrank from the ordeal.

However, I went out with Ned and Kitty the next day, and found the place had not been over-praised. A large parlor, divided by a hall from library and dining-room, splendid kitchen with every convenience, and butler's pantry, on the one floor; laundry, and light, airy cellar down stairs, four delightful chambers on the second floor; with bath room, back stairs, and servants' room, over the kitchen; and a regular old-fashioned garret with three gables. A roomy porch, a pretty conservatory, and a bay window in the library; the parlor sensibly on the north side. It was a bargain, even for these depressing times. How could I advise otherwise than for them to take it.



"You think it won't pinch you to raise me a little money?" whispered Ned, as we strolled along the grounds. "You see I should want to move in about ten days, and I would like five hundred now if you could raise it for me."

"You shall have it," I replied, promptly.

I took my policy to a broker the next day, and raised one thousand dollars, which I turned over to Ned, promising him the other thousand and the interest the first day of July.

We were very sorry to have them leave the city, but Kitty pictured the lovely visits we were to make, and the wonderful fruit we were to gather from the trees, and the roses Ned was to bring in town to his friends. Elizabeth was much interested, and promised to go out as soon as they were settled.

Up to this time Kitty had been her own housemaid, with the exception of occasional services. Now she looked about and found a young German woman, a deserted wife, with a boy two years old, who was willing to go for a good home and low wages.

I was quite curious to know what they would do in the matter of furnishing, for I knew Ned would have no money to spare. We went out the second week in June, and the place was in a glow of beauty. I do not know much about "symphonies of color," nor high art, nor Eastlake, nor Chippendale, nor Henri Deux, but this was a pretty, simple American home, with no Roman



candlesticks, and Moorish rugs, and Persian hangings, and cracked china, and jugs, and hideous bronzes. It did not tire the eye to look around, neither did you have to pick your way about. There was plenty of room indoors and out; there was matting on parlor and hall; there was a good wholesome painted kitchen floor; there were flowers swinging in windows, standing on brackets, perfuming every place, and the children ran about in wild delight.

The last of the month Ned informed me that he had made an arrangement with his insurance company to hold a mortgage of two thousand dollars. The interest of that, taxes and commutation, would be about as much as the rent he had paid in New York. He was very enthusiastic about gardening, and already into chicken business.

I cast about to see where I could raise the remaining thousand dollars. A friend proposed to loan me the sum for two years for one hundred bonus and interest. This I respectfully declined. Another wished me to give the endorsement of the firm. A third whom I had assisted materially in my bachelor days was very curious, and made some inquiries concerning the firm that old Mr. Trask thought extremely impertinent. Then I did what I had thought of at first, but shrank from with shame and disgust, gave a chattel mortgage on my furniture.

The baby began teething, and Elizabeth went to board at Longport, taking Rose. Letty Cann was very



glad to have a vacation. I used to run up to Ned's about every other night, and down to Longport to spend Sunday. The baby was very ill once for twenty-four hours. Elizabeth went into hysterics, and I was telegraphed for. We finished up our summer with a fortnight at Kitty's, and I managed to pay three hundred on my mortgage, but I practised a most rigid economy. I had no expensive lunches. I limited my cigars, and felt that I was growing penurious. What if I should turn miser in the end? But if I did ever get out of debt, nothing, *nothing*, NOTHING! should ever induce me to go behindhand again.

"Adolphus," said my wife one day in October, "I persuaded Mrs. Walton to let Dora come to us for part of the winter at least. She is a *very* pretty girl, but needs toning down and the polish that good society invariably gives. She will be here the first of November, and remain until after the holidays. Now, we must make it real bright and pleasant for her. They are always so kind to us."

"Yes," I answered from behind my paper. "I shall be very glad to have her come. I have always liked Dora."

Whatever may be Elizabeth's faults, and putting aside her utter inability to understand the smallest principle of economy, she has as few as most women, but one virtue shines out like a star in the night—she is not jealous!



"It would be pleasant, Adolphus, after she gets rested, and has one or two new dresses made, to invite in a few friends—do you not think so? I've behaved shamefully to society this last year, but my excuse is the duties of motherhood, and Laurie is so excessively cunning and pretty. I can never be sufficiently thankful, Adolphus, that Kitty Bromley overruled your absurd fancy for names, and that the child need never be ashamed of his. And it is strange," she went on plaintively, "how much sooner a man will listen to any other woman than he will to his wife."

"I am listening to you *now*, Elizabeth," I responded, pointedly.

"What was I talking of—you do break in upon one's thoughts so! Oh, Adolphus, *do* you know any nice young men? Dora will think it very dull if no one calls on her, or takes her out. There are the two Bonds living next door but one, and Gertie Henly has a brother, but you see the most of my gentlemen friends are older than she would care for, and artists and intellectual men."

"There is our bookkeeper—one of the numerous Van Duynes—a very nice young man, we think."

"And of good family," assented my wife readily. A Van or a De caught her fancy at once.

"I want you to think up a few. And, Adolphus, we must go to an opera, and some nice ball. We cannot be mean about such things, you know."



"I would quite like a good play myself," I said.  
"Yes, I will see about it when she comes."

Dora made her appearance a week later and was cordially welcomed. Elizabeth was very agreeable, and Dora thought her charming. They went out shopping, had a dressmaker, and we laughed and cried over the new star at Booth's.

Then the few friends were asked in. Professor Zaffa came to play on the piano and brought with him a violinist; the library was turned into a dancing-room, and an elegant supper laid in the dining-room with stylish black waiters, and also a very good looking youth at the hall door.

Yet I must confess I was somewhat taken aback at the magnitude of Elizabeth's "few friends." I should have called it a regular party. She was quite resplendent in mauve silk and velvet, while Dora was bewitching in white, with some pale, shimmering blue stuff over it, and coquettish blue bows, looking like little birds that had just lighted on it. Then she was so bright and merry that I had to smile at her myself.

Harry Van Duyne made his appearance, and proved a success. He was very good looking and gentlemanly, and danced splendidly, Dora said afterward. There was a little card playing, much music and talking, but the younger members gravitated naturally toward dancing. Everybody was extremely gay at supper, and I never remember Elizabeth being in better spirits or looking



handsomer. Since the birth of our child she appeared to have renewed her youth. Altogether it was a success. I enjoyed it so much myself that, although the bills afterward surprised me, I thought it best to make no comment to the partner of my joys, but I may mention, confidentially, that it quite drained my reserve fund.

There was much coming and going after this. We had a Christmas dinner with the Waltons and the Bromleys and a few others, and then we had New Year's calls, in a severely stylish manner. Dora plead to stay on, and Elizabeth wanted to keep her. Our house became quite a resort for evening callers. Some of our old friends seemed very glad to get back to us, and now and then discussed the absent ones. I must say many of those who had fallen out were no loss. Of the McFaddens, we heard that Tim had drank himself to death, and his wife, six months after, had married a French count. Elizabeth sighed a little at these tidings, and wondered whether I would ever feel that I could afford a winter at Paris. She had really gone nowhere since her marriage.

"Everybody speaks of my devotion to you, Adolphus," she said, with plaintive reproach.

However, she began to have her hands full. What woman can resist the temptation of match-making. Van Brickelbach became a frequent visitor, and she was always asking in dear Stacy. I must say that Miss Ger-



main had colored us a most lovely portrait of Laurie, and Van had painted one in oils that did not please me so well, but Elizabeth pronounced it more true to the rules of art. Then she had selected a lover for Dora, in the person of a small, slight youth, who wore immaculate kids and tremendous diamond shirt studs, and an eye-glass, and who answered to the name of Gouveneur Lockwood, but more familiarly known as Gov. His father was a great broker and real estate dealer, and railroad and steamboat man, and counted his fortune by millions. Then, young Mr. Lockwood had a maiden aunt, with a great fortune, whose will was made in his behalf, and who was "rather queer," at present, an inmate of some insane asylum, where she was put, it was rumored, to keep her from committing so desperate and dreadful a deed as matrimony. Mr. Lockwood drove a fine team, spent money lavishly, but, in my estimation, he was a fool, and worse. I once undertook to argue the point with Elizabeth, but I found her so illogical that I retired from the field in disgust. One thing afforded me immense satisfaction. I knew Mr. Lockwood was too much in love with his own perfumed and gorgeously gotten-up person to take a serious fancy to any one else, and Dora had too much good sense to be caught with such chaff. We had tickets showered upon us for everything, we had invitations until I was tired of them, but Elizabeth was in her glory. I had not the heart to interfere, though I did suggest occasionally that



—really—all this was quite expensive, and everybody was economizing, and times were hard—

“Adolphus, it is for *your* relative, not mine,” said Elizabeth, with the dignity of conscious rectitude. “I should think *you* would be glad to have me love and honor your relatives. I have no brothers and sisters of my own—you will observe that *old* families are never very large—not even a *mother*, Adolphus, for you to find fault with, but I am sure poor dear aunt Von Trump was the kindest of mothers to me, and I have a sympathetic presentiment that I shall never see her again,” and my wife put her handkerchief to her eyes. “No, Adolphus, you have never been asked to spend a penny for *my* family, and they have loaded me with kindnesses, yes, and gifts when I was married, even if they were stolen. And now you grudge me the few little pleasures I am offering to Dora, your own cousin’s child—”

“No ! no !” I cried hurriedly, “I don’t grudge you anything reasonable, my dear, but—”

“Adolphus, you are growing absolutely penurious ! A miser is my utter abhorrence !”

I said no more.

A few days after this I came home with a stuffy cold in my head, a pain in my back, and an intense aching in all my limbs. My temples throbbed like a trip-hammer, I was hot and cold by turns, and in the evening a most racking headache set in. Dora and Elizabeth had gone



to a concert, but Rose Muldoon was kindly solicitous, bathed my head, made mustard draughts, and would fain have sent for the doctor, but I thought I would wait until morning.

When my wife returned she was all hysterical excitement, though knowing well the delicate state of her nerves, I refrained from groaning aloud.

“What did I think it was? Had I exposed myself to small pox or scarlet fever or measles, or anything that I could bring home to the boy? The father of a family ought to be doubly careful.”

I faintly suggested pneumonia, which was very prevalent but not at all catching.

“I don’t know,” said Elizabeth, shaking her head mournfully. “It does sometimes go through whole families. And if Laurie should take it, dear, sweet little lamb! Good gracious, Adolphus, and this door I suppose has been open to the nursery the whole evening! Men never *do* think. I shall have the doctor the first thing in the morning. Have you been anywhere, or do you remember taking any very dirty looking money? contagion is carried in that you know. Now if you had been buying a suit of clothes—I should say those poor wretched people who toil for their scanty pittance might—but it is one comfort to think you have no new clothes. I shudder to think of the risk men do run, with innocent families to suffer. And, Adolphus, I believe I’ll make a bed on the sofa in the next room. I’ll put a bell on the



table so that if you want anything you can call, and I will ask Rose to come down stairs."

"Yes, my dear, you had better go," I said faintly, for though the voice of my charmer is not registered on upper C, it was more than I could bear just now.

Left alone to myself I tossed and tumbled, I scorched and froze, and terrible suspicions came into my mind. What was it? What if I were to be very ill and die! Elizabeth a widow, my child fatherless!

In the dread and solemn hour of night this awful vision confronted me. My furniture was mortgaged, my life policy pledged. No sooner would the breath be out of my body, at least, no longer than I was safely under ground would these hungry claimants wait. There would be the cruel mortification, the disgrace, the scandal, confronting my beloved wife, who would never know why I did such a thing. People would suspect me of gambling, of keeping improper company, of forgery or murder, or some dreadful secret whose silence I had been compelled to purchase. Why did he do it? the thousand tongues would ask. Old Mr. Trask would elevate his eyebrows and shake his head mournfully at his misplaced trust. He might even go over the books to see if I had not defrauded him. Oh, those wretched wedding presents! If we could have married without them; if we could have gone to housekeeping simply, and kept out of debt. And now it must all be blazoned forth to the world!



I suppose, at last, I fell into a troubled slumber. I fancied I was climbing a steep, high hill, with an enormous load on my back. Over my head toppled uncle Von Trump's great carved bedstead; on my arms were strung silver ware, pictures, bronzes, and verde-antiques, whose hideous grinning faces leered, and each one seemed to have a jeering voice, that said—"We are wedding presents! we are wedding presents! Up the hill with us you must climb, for your bride awaits you!" I tugged and worked; my arms ached; my back was strained to the uttermost; my neck was nearly broken; I gasped and groaned, but all in vain, on I must go. Occasionally my foot slipped, and then all the articles banged together with a dreadful clatter, bruising and rasping me. On and on, until I reached the top, when there stood Joanna, our once highly esteemed maid, with a fiendish smile on her face, a mocking light in her eyes, and touching my pack with her fingers, she laughed long and loud. Down the hill it rolled with terrific reverberations, and seemed ground to powder. A swarm of imps started out of the debris, and dancing round wildly, screamed at the top of their lungs—"We are wedding presents! we are wedding presents!" and I awoke, gasping and panting.

The doctor came in about ten o'clock.

"Sorry to see you here, Mr. Stryker," said he. "A little feverish—h-m-m. Any pain in your chest?"

I believe I said I was in pain all over.



He sounded my chest, my lungs, and listened to my breathing. I awaited his verdict with solemn awe.

“Sound as a nut! There’s nothing the matter with you but a little feverish cold. You’ll be out again in a day or two. It is as well to be careful, however.”

“And it is not contagious?” cried Elizabeth, much relieved.

“Not a bit of it. Nurse him up a little, and he will soon be as good as new.”

I drew a long, thankful breath. I knew how a reprieved criminal felt.

Elizabeth proved herself the most solicitous of wives for the next three days, and Dora was the most bewitching of nurses. Van Bricklebach sent me some hot-house fruit, and Miss Germain played chess with me all one evening. Harry Van Duyne came up every evening, and if it had not been for that awful, haunting shadow of debt, I should have been a happy man.

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## CHAPTER XI.

I NEVER would have believed it, never!” declared Elizabeth, majestically.

“Believed what?” I inquired, looking fondly at my son in his cradle.

“That Van Bricklebach—but how *could* he? That is



what I can't understand, Adolphus. He with all his art education, his true and harmonious sympathy, his keen perception of form and color, his intense nervousness when anything outrages the canons of strict taste, his lofty ideals, his—" and my wife looked at me aghast.

"What has he done?"

"And I felt sure they of all others would be kindred spirits! They had the same tastes, the same pursuits; they would have a home in accordance with the correct rules of art. Their life would have been an idyl! I am wounded to my heart's core. My poor, dear Stacy!"

"Have they quarrelled?" I began to see the drift of my wife's anxiety, I thought.

"Quarrelled!" No black type and white paper, no millions of exclamation points could do justice to my wife's tone. I felt sure then that the stage had lost one of its brightest ornaments, and was humbled to think of what I had deprived the world.

"Well, such things do happen."

"Adolphus, you know nothing about it. I have always said you might have a good faculty for business, though it does seem as if you ought to have made more money, but you have not an artistic temperament. A man who cannot tell Mezza Majolica from Etruscan, or Medicean porcelain from delft ought not pretend—"

"I do not, my dear," I replied meekly.

"And she refused him!" went on Elizabeth, with a tone of sombre tragedy.



“Miss Germain?”

“No, no! you are always so impatient, Adolphus. It was Dora! The utter incongruity of his asking her is only equalled by the mad foolishness of the child in refusing him!”

“Why surely,” I said in surprise, “you would not want a sweet young girl like Dora, hardly seventeen, to marry that withered up, parchment-colored, bald-headed, middle-aged man—”

“Adolphus, do you know of whom you are speaking?”

“He may be well enough in an art way,” said I, with sudden boldness, “but as a husband for a young girl—and he really fell in love with our gay, bewitching Dora, who laughs at him, teases him and ridicules the very things he adores; oh, it is too funny!” and I dropped into a chair, weak from laughing. “I don’t wonder you are surprised.”

“Do not make an idiot of yourself,” exclaimed my wife, severely.

There was a diversion just then. Rose brought up stairs an elegant basket of hot-house flowers with Mr. Lockwood’s compliments, and would Miss Walton like to drive in the park to-morrow morning?

“Yes,” answered Elizabeth, valiantly. “She is out just now, Rose, but she will be very happy to go, tell him, with Mrs. Stryker’s compliments. And now, Adolphus,” turning to me with a lofty and judicial



aspect, "I suppose if Mr. Lockwood were to propose to Dora, you would have some good reason why she should not accept him."

"I certainly should. He is a fool to begin with ; he knows nothing of any kind of business ; he deems it his bounden duty to run after every star actress, and drags out a useless, if not a positively vicious life ! I am sorry Dora has seen so much of him, or that she has met him here. And I wish she would not go to ride with him."

"If *I* had a daughter, I should consider him an excellent match."

"No daughter of mine should marry such a man," I declared, emphatically.

"I always *knew* you would make a tyrannical father, Adolphus. My poor little daughter, you would find your mother your best friend," and Elizabeth put her handkerchief to her eyes.

"My dear," I said, as the absurdity of the thing struck me, "do not let us quarrel over such a trifle. We may never have a daughter."

Here Laurence Wayne raised his voice, and Elizabeth flew to him. The dinner bell rang, and, as we started, Dora came into the hall, looking pretty as a pink, after a pleasant walk. I wanted to give her a fond, fatherly kiss, but I bethought myself that it was best not to try my wife's patience too far.

That evening, when Elizabeth was down stairs with



some callers, I took the opportunity to ask Dora a few questions concerning Mr. Lockwood.

“Why, cousin Adolphus, did you imagine I had lost my heart to that silly little goose! I would not be his wife!”—and Dora blushed vividly at the mere mention—“for all the wealth of New York, I was about to say. He is so insufferably conceited, he is such a prig, and what my father calls a noodle. I would not have gone out with him at all, only—cousin Elizabeth is so very good to me, and I hate to vex her. Then you know I am going home next week, and it is not at all likely he would want to marry a farmer’s daughter. He might send me a handsome basket of flowers—I wouldn’t allow him to give me anything else—and then he might fling just the same at the feet of a pretty stage dancer. The man who dares to love me must hold me a little higher than that.”

How beautiful and proud she looked, this dainty Dora.

“But Van Brickelbach was caught—”

“Oh, cousin, I felt so sorry—I really did,” and the touch of regret made her look lovelier than ever. “Yet it was so—so absurd,” and she gave that merry, tinkling laugh. “Why, we have not a thought alike, and he is so much older, and oh, so queer looking. I used to tease him just for fun, and I thought all the time he was liking Miss Germain, who, after all, is too sweet and pretty for him. And cousin Elizabeth feels hurt



about it, but I never imagined—I'm sure I never tried to make him like me. I've had such a good, nice, splendid time with the concerts, and parties, and rides, and everything, and I'm glad you're not vexed with me, but I can promise you truly that Mr. Lockwood's money will never tempt me in the least."

I drew her to my heart and kissed her, the sweet, guileless girl, who had her mother's good sense, with much more than her mother's beauty.

We were all sorry to have Dora leave us. Even little Laurie had been captivated with her, and laughed to her the instant she entered the room. She had taught him many cunning tricks, and he was beginning to walk, and could say a few words, when his capricious lordship chose, which was not often.

The wife of my bosom carried herself loftily toward me for several days, but as the dressmaker was coming, she unbent sufficiently to express her desire for a little money, insisting that she positively had not a thing to wear. Another shock quite restored her to marital confidence. Letty Cann, our treasure, announced that she had received an excellent offer of marriage from a brother in her church; a widower with four small children, a well-to-do man, owning a corner house, and keeping a prosperous grocery. There was no doubt, in her mind, but that sailor Cann was dead, at least she was quite willing to "resk it." She would be married the first of May.



And Dora had said, "I positively must go on Saturday."

"Mr. Stryker," said Harry Van Duyne, that Saturday morning, "can I get off at noon? I'll have the books written up, and the pay rolls made out, and I may not be back here until Tuesday morning."

I looked at the young fellow in surprise, and he actually blushed. But his clear, honest eyes braved mine in a manly fashion.

"I do not know but I ought to tell you; you have been very kind to me, Mr. Stryker," and there he stopped, strangely embarrassed at so common-place a fact, I thought.

"I am much obliged for your good opinion," I returned. "You may have the time, of course."

"I mean—that is—I have been a good deal at your house this winter, Mr. Stryker."

"Yes. We have enjoyed your calls." Was that the proper thing to say?

"And, I do not know whether you have thought; but your cousin, Miss Walton—"

I know I opened my eyes wide. A curious impression penetrated my brain.

"Has been kind enough to allow me to escort her to Longport, and I hope, on my return—"

"Dora! And you are in love with her!"

"I am in love with her, and I think she is not quite—will not be very obdurate, I mean, if her parents con-



sent. She is so sweet and lovable, how could a man help it, and so beautiful, Mr. Stryker. I owe you a debt of gratitude for giving me the inestimable pleasure of making her acquaintance. I know she might marry richer men, but she could not find one who would love her more devotedly, or who will endeavor more truly in all the years to come to make her happy."

"I am sure you have my good wishes, Harry," I said, from the bottom of my heart. "I think you will find Mr. Walton a plain, sensible man, who will study his child's welfare; and you are a lucky fellow to have won the heart of our charming little Dora."

"Thank you, Mr. Styker," and he wrung my hand warmly.

So the sly little puss had been making love before our very eyes, and we had not seen it. I could hardly doubt what the Waltons' verdict would be. It was kindred youth, and hope, and fervor, a community of interests, and Harry Van Duyne stood just where I had, at the age of twenty-four. As well marry in the spring time of life, when the world and love are new, as to wait, for a more propitious season cannot come.

I had said good-bye to Dora that morning, and sent an expressman after her trunk. I heard when I came home that Elizabeth had been prevented from going to the station with her by an unexpected call, so she had sent Miss Muldoon for company. There was a loud lamenting for several days, but I thought it best to keep Dora's



secret for a while, though I wanted to give the little witch a squeeze for her cunning innocence.

"And now," said Elizabeth, one evening in the retirement of our chamber, when she was in dressing-gown, and I in slippers, "and now, I suppose, trouble will begin again. I'm sure I do not see why Mrs. Cann should want to marry, and bother with four children, when she could be care free, with twelve dollars a month, and the interest of her own money. Wherever we are to find a new girl fit for anything I do not know."

I drew a long breath. Ever since that terrible night of my illness, I had felt it an imperative duty to discuss the problem of household economy with the partner of my joys and sorrows, and my yearly income. Some way this awful incubus of debt must be removed.

"My dear," I began in my most mellifluous tone, "I have a subject I wish to present to your attention. Perhaps it would be well to consider it now, while we are making some new arrangements."

My wife turned her eyes full upon me with a peculiar expression, something as if she questioned whether I were in my right mind. I have observed that a woman invariably doubts a man's mental steadiness when he touches the topic of expenditures.

"Well, Adolphus !"

The sensation of a bucket of cold water being poured down my back was not encouraging. I summoned my rapidly depressed forces for a vigorous attack. Sheridan's



ride should be my plan rather than a summer in the trenches with McClellan.

"My dear," I began. "I feel that I must call your attention to a subject that has caused me sleepless nights and troubled days. When I was so ill in March, you remember—"

"Do you call that little cold being ill!" and my wife laughed with a malicious gaiety, that, to say the least, disconcerted me. "But I believe if a man has a finger ache he always imagines he is going to die. I think your general health is wonderful, Adolphus. And as to nerves, you haven't any. How many nights I have had to wake you, by main force, as one might say, to listen to baby's breathings, when I hardly dared lose myself an instant for fear of croup."

"Yet he never has had croup," I returned triumphantly.

"He never has had—a great many diseases, Adolphus. I have been very careful, *very*," and there was a touch of strictly conscientious approval in her tone.

I was wandering from my subject, or being carried from it, and with a determined effort I brought myself back.

"Although my illness seemed a small thing to you, Elizabeth," I began in a most impressive tone, "still, in the solemn depths of that night, I had a grave subject to consider. I—"

"Oh, good gracious, Adolphus!" and my wife threw



up both hands. "How you do manage to harrow up one's feelings, without the slightest regard for *my* nerves! I know what it was—you thought about making your will. I must say that is one of the things that ought not be left until one is on a sick bed. You know that wills are so frequently contested—"

Was a beneficent providence smiling upon me? I am ashamed to admit that I hastened to take advantage of my wife's mood.

"It was a still more painful fact, my dear. I had nothing to will; not only that, but we are in debt. I feel that it is my duty as a husband and a father to explain this, that together we may be able to take some steps—"

"*Were* you in debt when you married me, Mr. Stryker?" she asked in a severe, judicial tone.

"I was not. I had, as I told you, no debts, and an income of five thousand dollars. This would no doubt have increased in good times, but there has been so great a shrinkage in values, and so small an amount of business done, that we consider ourselves fortunate to have held our own."

"But where *did* the debts come from?" she asked in amazement. "Adolphus, are you sure you do not drink or gamble—"

"I drink! I gamble! Madam, you should know better!" I cried in an offended tone.

"I am sure you need not bite my head off!" Let us hope it was a figure of speech merely with her. "When



I ask a simple question I have a right to be answered. As the mother of your son I am entitled to some respect, even if you have ceased to regard the wife of—of—” and her voice began to tremble ominously.

“My dear,” I said, soothingly, “I am ready to answer every question. These debts were incurred when we began housekeeping. Through the munificence of your friends you became the happy recipient of numberless gifts. We were compelled to furnish our house to correspond, we had to live according to the style of those wedding gifts—”

“And they were beautiful!” sobbed Elizabeth. “I am sure I thought it a nice thing to have them, and so would any reasonable man. And it *did* save us a good deal when we went to housekeeping. If you had been compelled to buy our silver and glassware, and china—”

“I think I *have* bought the most of it. There is very little of the original remaining,” I answered, grimly.

“I am sure I couldn’t help thieves, Adolphus, and that deceitful Joanna, with the face of a saint. And servants will break things, and they wear out and get old-fashioned, and—and—you are very cruel, Adolphus, to torture my nerves in this way, when the well being of our child depends upon my tranquillity. But men are so unreasonable—” and she gave a long, hysterical sob. “What shall I do? Will you sell everything off at auction, and shall I go out washing—”



“Do calm yourself, and be sensible,” I said, rather shortly, for I was losing my temper. “I merely want to reduce expenses a little, live on four thousand instead of five, and use the surplus until the debt is cleared off. If I should die—”

Elizabeth gave a heart-rending cry, and dropped over on the sofa. I knew then what had happened. The wise purpose of woman’s nerves may be hereafter revealed, but in this era of the world they are shrouded by a dim and inscrutable providence. Are they for purposes of self-defence, like a cat’s claws, sheathed when all goes fair, but, at the moment of danger, bristling all over? Would a woman, when a note was going to protest, rush to the bank, upbraid the official, and have a hysteric, I wonder? This point ought to be settled on a firm and uncompromising basis before the equality of the sexes is determined.

I bathed her face, I chafed her hands, I even descended from my majestic perch, as judge and dictator, and ventured upon an endearing term or two, but Elizabeth grew more rigid, more deathly pale, and a long, convulsive breath, at infrequent intervals, was the only sign of life. The baby woke and cried, and I rang for Rose.

“Mrs. Stryker has fainted,” I said. “She is somewhat subject to delicate spells, when a little thing upsets her. I wonder if we had better have the doctor?”

“He left some drops for her. I’ll give her those,” said



the kindly handmaiden. "Will you please take master Laurie, and I will see what I can do."

"I will go down to the library," I said, heartlessly. "If you want me, call."

Laurie was soon laughing and crowing, and trying to master the paper weight. I fell into a very brown study. Was I developing into a domestic tyrant, an arbitrary, soulless master, a mean, sordid skinflint? For I felt that now this debt must be paid. We had commenced the fifth year of our married life, and I was making no advance. Under the auspices of a raw Irish girl in the kitchen, household economy would be too profound a subject to be mastered. If we boarded, for instance, and I made a running calculation at thirty dollars a week, five more for washing, three for one girl, about two thousand a year, another thousand for clothes and extras—why, it *would* be cheaper. We must store the furniture, and then—to be sure, I had the house on my hands, but it would pay me to rent it at some loss.

Miss Muldoon broke in upon my buoyant arithmetic. Still, I did feel better. I had no secret from Elizabeth now, and it would be to her interest to help me get out of debt as soon as possible. But, now that I thought of it, my wife was singularly free from any mercenary or calculating spirit. There were women who were continually nagging at men to make some provision for their widowhood, as if indeed, it were a foregone conclusion. There must be piles of insurance policies,



houses and lots settled on them, and money in the bank in their own name. I believe I would rather have my sanguine, unpractical Elizabeth.

Rose took the baby up stairs ; it was his bed time. I was left alone with my plans and calculations. Nine o'clock struck. My paper was up stairs, and I thought I would not disturb my wife. I lighted a cigar and opened the window, smoked and ruminated. It was very mortifying not to be able to pay that small sum, in a space of four years and over. Now that I was aroused I certainly *would* do something at it. Moreover, I would teach my son to have a horror of debt and—wedding presents.

Ten o'clock. I was growing sleepy, so I bolted the doors and windows, and went quietly up stairs. The light was burning low in the ground globe, and there was a smell of aromatic hartshorn and the faint perfume of Florida water. Elizabeth lay silent and quiet, and I did not disturb her, but, I must confess, a rather culprit-like misgiving came over me.

The next day Mrs. Striker was not down stairs at all. I took my dinner in solitary state, and had a rather confidential chat with Letty Cann, deeming it my duty to warn her against the perils of matrimony, and also suggesting an unpleasant denouement if sailor Cann should happen to put in an appearance some day, but she was made of brave material, and not easily daunted. And I could not help admitting to myself that the grocer



would get a tidy, smart, economical helpmeet. My loss, no doubt, would be his gain.

Mrs. Stryker was in a frilled white wrapper, lying on the sofa. She greeted me in a kindly, but languid voice, and there was a slight expression of wordless upbraiding in her eyes. Our conversation was chiefly about the baby, that safety valve between parents.

Several days passed in this manner. Elizabeth kept about the same, and I began to feel rather anxious. She was so patient and deferential that I wondered if I had not been too harsh and peremptory.

However, she opened the subject herself.

"Adolphus," she began one evening, "Letty is to go away next week. Have you thought of anything, made any plans?"

Here was the golden moment which I must seize. How could I best begin?

"My dear Adolphus," she went on, as I sat speechless, quite overwhelmed by her kindness, "we were talking the other evening, you remember, on a subject which—which quite unnerved me. I do not suppose I am quite as strong as I used to be, after devoting myself so exclusively to baby in his first critical year, too; and then I never pretended to have any head for business. Still, I do regret that you should be—should be weighted down by debt," and she seemed to pick her way with delicate care—was it consideration for my feelings? "and I was thinking that if you preferred to send Laurie



and me to some simple, out of the way country place where board was cheap, and if—I really don't know what to suggest," and she sighed.

"I have been studying the subject," I made answer. "I do believe it would be cheaper to board."

"To give up our house—?" she gasped. "Do you mean to sell the furniture?"

I wondered if I could so explain the fact of its being mortgaged as to adapt it to the delicate understanding of the feminine mind, and not run the risk of another attack of nerves. Now that Elizabeth was in such a conciliatory frame of mind it would be sad indeed to ruffle her.

"We might store it, you know, for a year or two."

"Yes," plaintively. "But it is generally so ruined by moths and dust, that—yes, I *do* think we had better sell it if we contemplate boarding for a year or two."

Sell it in these dull times when auction rooms were overcrowded! Still, as Elizabeth never went to auctions, how could she understand the state of affairs.

"If we could do something on a simpler scale. If we could dispense with one girl—"

"I don't know how we could," said my wife, still with angelic sweetness. "For certainly, Adolphus, a wife and a mother needs to keep herself in a higher and more intellectual atmosphere than a kitchen, moiling and toiling over scouring pans and dish-washing. There may be souls who delight in such occupations, but to me it



would be excessively distasteful. And now that Laurie is coming to a certain stage of intelligence, who so well as a mother can watch over the unfolding mind and provide it proper aliment. If I washed and ironed, baked and brewed, what time should I have for æsthetic duties and pleasures, for reading, art culture and society. I did not think when I married you, Adolphus, that you desired a mere household drudge, but a companion," and her eyes rested reproachfully on me.

"So I did, my dear," I made haste to answer, in a rather conscience-smitten manner.

"If you consider it best I will give up my home without a murmur, though I think I have made it very attractive. Van Bricklebach was saying one day in the winter that he did not know of a place he enjoyed so much as this, and as a general thing my taste is considered very correct."

I wondered how much of the charm was due to the youth and gladsome brightness of little Dora.

"I suppose you have your plans all laid, and I will not disarrange them by any opposition. I only ask that I may take Rose with me. Do not deprive me of everything—" and she wiped away a tear quietly.

"My dear, I have *not* decided. I would not take such an important step without consulting you. But I feel that if anything should happen to me—"

"Don't, Adolphus, don't," and my wife stretched out her hand imploringly. "I know you will outlive me,



but I want to leave a pleasant memory behind in my child's heart, and this I certainly could not do if I was busy from morning to night, and compelled to be severe and impatient with him, as mothers are, whose nerves are worn and hardened by toil. No, a more glorious duty is laid upon me. I must be his friend, his instructor, his companion. And, Adolphus, I may be the mother of girls—how could I train them with no knowledge, no leisure, no cultivation. Education and refinement is considered so much more necessary than in the bygone years.”

How did Kitty Bromley manage? Her little girls were charmingly trained, and she was not rendered coarse or fretful.

“We might board a year—” and I considered.

“True. Some pretty country place in the summer, and—I *should* like to be in the city in the winter. One loses so much that is really valuable by being buried alive in a suburb in the winter. And then the travelling for you—through rain and snow—” and she glanced at me with solicitude. “There would be the expense of packing and storing, the two removals, the board bills, the extras one cannot help, but I am sure I would try, rather than that you should be driven almost insane by debt. You remember that you moved here from motives of economy, and I don't believe we saved so very much after all.”



Perhaps it was not in human nature to forget that episode.

“Well, I will see what can be done. Certainly I *must* get out of debt. It is really disgraceful.”

Elizabeth sighed and leaned back on her pillow.

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## CHAPTER XII.

I CONSULTED a house agent, who thought, it being so late in the season, that I would have to offer the house for twelve hundred to make it at all attractive. Then he suggested renting it furnished. Of course. Why had I not thought of that? The fall would be a better time, but I might be able to do something. I would try. I put an advertisement in the paper. I answered several. Two hundred and fifty dollars a month would be the lowest figure, but we asked three hundred. Then we set about looking up a boarding place. I had half a mind to apply to Ned, but Elizabeth heard of something up the Hudson, a regular farm house, where people would be taken for seven dollars a week apiece, “and I am sure that’s cheap enough,” she exclaimed, triumphantly. “Mrs. Sperry is going up to engage rooms, and wants me to go with her, next Tuesday.”

As fate would have it, some one came to look at the house on Saturday. A gentleman from the West,



whose business would be in New York most of the coming year, and whose wife was very anxious to live in the city. There were two grown daughters and three younger children. No demur was made as to price. The agent thought it a wonderful streak of luck. I should make a thousand dollars for the use of the furniture, and, perhaps, save another thousand in living. Why, I felt already as if I were out of debt.

Elizabeth liked Mount Nebo. It was on a rise of ground, and you could look over at the blue Hudson. Why they gave it such a Biblical name puzzled me. We were to have a large front room, and Rose a small one adjoining, opening on the hall. We were to be taken for twenty-four dollars, washing extra.

"The house is not furnished in very elegant style," explained Elizabeth, glancing around, "but there is a large lawn, with shade trees, and a beautiful grove, fresh milk, and an abundance of fruit. And if Mrs. Sperry can go there I think I may content myself for the summer," and my wife sighed.

We packed up some of our choice belongings, and stored them in one room, which we locked. Then our trunks were put in travelling order, and, really, it seemed like a second removal.

"Are all those trunks and boxes to go to Mount Nebo?" I asked, aghast.

"To be sure," answered Elizabeth, serenely. "I am to take my linen bedding. I could not endure cotton



sheets for the summer, and I want my own towels and our clothes, and baby's things, and Rose's trunk, and baby's bath, and carriage, and crib—"

"Yes, yes!" and out I went to engage a carman.

The Whittleseys came in the third week in May, and we went out. I saw our baggage safely bestowed upon the boat, found my wife and my wife's handmaiden, who had my son in her arms. It was a pleasant sail, and the boat reached there at five. A very dilapidated and musty-smelling hack conveyed us to our destination, though I really thought the stage more inviting looking. We rumbled and jumbled over the dusty road, and up the hill, turned into a lane, and there we were. Mrs. Sperry came out to meet my wife with open arms. A farm wagon, further back, was bringing up the furniture and trunks.

The grounds, and the great, roomy porch, did very well, but I was rather appalled at the plainness of the apartments. No shutters, and yellow holland shades to the windows, a dingy ingrain carpet on the floor, a cottage suite, with fiery ornamentations, in red and blue, six rush-bottomed chairs, and one Boston rocker. I glanced at Elizabeth in the utmost surprise. How could she be content!

"You do not like it, Adolphus, I see, but you wanted to economize, and I'm sure I've done my best. We could have gone down to Seabright for ten dollars apiece, and there was a lovely place at Roselawn, where



they would have taken us all for forty dollars, but you did not want to pay that, and Mrs. Sperry is very stylish. They spend ever so much more money than we do, and she has her carriage and horses up here."

"My dear, I am not going to find fault if you are satisfied," I returned, pleasantly.

My wife gave a long sigh.

We were summoned down to supper. The viands did very well, but there was a kind of scurrying in serving. The mistress poured tea with a cream jug in the other hand, and slopped in the sugar with a much-worn plated spoon, as if she were working against time. The dishes reminded me of a second rate restaurant. The bread was of the solid, rather damp order, and the butter, though sweet, had a taste of wild onions, but cake and preserves were in prodigal abundance. Glancing down the table, I discovered two familiar faces, beside that of Mrs. Sperry, young men of artistic proclivities, who had visited at our house the past winter. One of them seemed to be under the especial patronage of Mrs. Sperry.

I bought a commutation ticket the next morning, good for a month. When I came home at night I found Elizabeth in high spirits. Mrs. Sperry and Mr. Hatch had been to ride, and Mr. Colby had taken my wife. I am not a jealous man by nature, and society manners—I should say the culture, refinement, and amenities of society—do not admit of such vulgar passions on the



part of husbands. I was pleased to have my wife enjoy herself and keep good tempered, and as art topics were her great delight, she had found congenial minds.

Still I could not help contrasting this place with the home of the Waltons. This was boarding, pure and simple ; you paid a certain amount, and then tried to get all you could out of your landlady. From Mrs. Brown's imperturbable face I judged that complaints would have about the same effect as pouring water on a duck's back. I had none to make. True, I missed my cool, high-ceiled sleeping room and my modern conveniences, but I reflected that it was much cheaper, and that I would save by the operation. We always had a bountiful supply of berries and fresh milk, and presently Mrs. Brown began to save some tidbit for me, because I was not home to dinner.

At the first of July I made up accounts. My income from all sources had been seven hundred ; my expenses had averaged two hundred. Wild with delight, I paid five hundred dollars on my mortgaged furniture. There were but two hundred remaining. I could have danced up and down for joy, but I thought of my age and my position as the father of a family.

But alas ! matters did not remain as serene at Mount Nebo. My opinion, from all I heard and saw, inclined me to believe Mrs. Sperry that reprehensible creature, a married flirt. While she was willing to spare one of her adorers for Elizabeth, she was a darling creature, but



when she insisted upon monopolizing all ; when she carried them off to shady groves, made them both give her lessons in sketching, her selfishness and numerous faults became plainly visible. And then she had the unkindness to say "that it looked so silly in a woman of Mrs. Stryker's age, a mother too, to act like a young flirt of sixteen." Mrs. Sperry owned to twenty-eight, but from her looks I judged she had remained at that period for some time. Elizabeth never owned to anything. Her age, like that of the sphynx, was a profound mystery.

The place became very hot, in spite of the awnings I had made for every window. Then the baby fell sick, and my wife was sure the place did not agree with him. Once admitting the serpent of discontent, our Paradise became Purgatory rapidly, and by the middle of July Elizabeth upbraided me with a wife's tender affection, and insisted that I had brought her to Mount Nebo to die. She had come for *my* sake purely, but there was a limit to all things. "Perhaps when Laurie and she were in the grave—"

"Where would you like to go, my dear ?" I inquired mildly, for I felt that a change was impending.

"I have been considering the subject, Adolphus," said she in a weak voice. "We must have a bracing air. Mrs. Lewis and Dolly are at the loveliest place at the White Mountains, and the nights are so delightfully



cool. We can have elegant board for ten dollars a week, servants seven. If you could get off—”

“I might take you there and spend a week,” I returned, “and you could remain until the hot weather was over.”

Elizabeth thought this delightful. She wrote to her friend immediately, and I was deputed to give up the rooms and settle with Mrs. Brown. But I found that easy-going woman exceedingly obdurate. I had taken the rooms for the summer, and pay for them I must, since she had lost other chances to let them.

I mildly expostulated with her, offering to pay full board until the first of August, but I found I had caught a Tartar. Her pound of flesh she would have, whether or not. I fell back upon the fact that my wife and child were ill, and must have change of air, at which she gave a cold-blooded, doubtful sneer that roused my temper.

“Very well,” I said, “if I have to pay for the place I shall put some one else in it. I think the wife of our porter and her two children would be very glad to come.”

Elizabeth packed again, or rather I think it was Rose. Part of the things were sent to the city and stored in the back office. The rest were checked for their new destination. I took my household under my wing, figuratively speaking, and we set out on our new journey. Mrs. Sperry and my wife bade each other a cool adieu, and Mrs. Brown informed me she would settle on my



own basis, board to be paid until the first of August, which would give her ten days to re-let the rooms, although we heard afterward that two days later new tenants came in.

We found Mrs. Lewis admirably domiciled in a pleasant family hotel. I enjoyed the week of idleness, and Elizabeth was quite as enthusiastic as she had been over our unfortunate Mount Nebo. A week later she was joined by Mr. and Mrs. Walton and Dora, and Harry Van Duyne spent his two weeks' vacation with them. My wife announced the engagement with great surprise, and found but one thing to approve. "He comes of a good old family, as one can tell by his name, and, if she must marry a clerk, the 'Van' is something."

I decided to spend the intervening weeks with Ned Bromley, coming into the city every morning as he did. I must confess that I quite returned to my old dreams. I used to sit on the porch, while Ned and Kitty rambled round, tying up a rose, snipping off a dead branch, pulling a stray weed, planning how they would arrange everything next year. There never were such cucumbers, or beans, or corn, and every room was sweet with heliotrope and mignonette. I fell into a dreamy, pastoral mood. I listened to Kitty as she read bits of Morris' Paradise aloud, and remembered my youthful fancies wherein brown eyes played a part.

My tenant had not come up to the mark the first of



August, and my own expenses had proved rather heavy, so I had no money that I could spare. However, I did not allow that to trouble my heavenly slumbers, nor my Eden-like waking hours. In fact, nothing disturbed me until Elizabeth mentioned that it was growing very cool, and she had promised the Waltons a visit. Would it not be as well for her to come into the city for a few days, do a little shopping, and then go to Longport? All of which admirable arrangements I acquiesced in, and engaged rooms at a hotel for them. My little son was round and rosy, could say everything after a certain fashion, and Elizabeth was much improved. She shopped, she came down to the office, unpacked and packed again, exchanged summer clothing for autumn wear, and wondered what we were to do during the winter.

“If we could board at a hotel! There is so much gossip and so many ill-natured remarks in private boarding houses,” said she. “That place at Mount Nebo was dreadful! I never imagined Mrs. Sperry was so deceitful and underhand, and vain, and silly! The admiration of those two boys was all she cared for. And her pretending to be only twenty-eight! Why, she has been married twenty years, I do believe!”

I went down to Longport with my family, and when I returned dropped in at my agent's. He looked at me with a very blank face.

“We have been swindled! Mr. Stryker,” he began



emphatically. "Those Whittleseys are what you might call genteel tramps. Their reference was a sham, like themselves. And they decamped without a word."

"Left the house—"

"Yes. He made some excuse when July's rent came due—was expecting some money, and all that, but, if I liked, would give me a note for thirty days. I decided to wait a week or two, and, meanwhile, made some further inquiries about him, and found that his numerous agencies were not very reliable. Then I wrote to a friend in St. Louis to hunt up his antecedents, and found that he failed last winter, was ever so much in debt, and considered a regular confidence man, an out-and-out swindler. I went up to the house one evening and found it locked up, with not even a servant at home. Next morning I dropped into his office, and learned that the bird had flown, though he had the grace to leave the keys. He went away largely in debt to butcher and grocer, and owing sums of borrowed money, some of which he obtained of *your* friends, Mr. Stryker, by false representations."

My heart fell within me like lead. The two months' rent, that I had so counted on, that was to exalt me another round in the ladder of debt paying, had suddenly become a blank. I did not see how I could blame the agent, as he had written to both of the persons given as reference, and received favorable replies. Then, the man and his wife had a certain air of well-to-do



people that had deceived me, and not me alone, it seemed.

“He ought to be arrested !” I exclaimed, indignantly, “if such things did not always cost more than they amount to !”

“I went through the house, and I believe about everything is safe.”

“Lucky for me that they did not carry off my furniture. However, I think I will take the keys, and go up myself, this evening,” I said.

I found kitchen, cellar and closets in the utmost disorder, to say nothing of untidiness. The dining-room carpet had two great blotches of grease, the globes in the chandelier were broken, and the chairs evinced marks of hard usage. On the parlor floor matters were in a better condition, though I found one large pane of glass cracked, and one of Elizabeth’s choice vases in ruins, while the beautiful china cuspidor, that she had had ornamented according to Van Bricklebach’s design, had an ugly notch broken out of the rim. The rooms above made me sick at heart ; the bath-room was in a most fearful condition, both faucets leaking a stream. How any one could do so much damage in less than three months puzzled me, until I remembered how some of our handmaidens had wrought ruin and devastation.

My first impulse was to sit down and write a full and bitter account to Elizabeth, so natural is it for a man to confide in the faithful heart of his wife. Then I re-



flected. The tenant was none of her getting. The plan had not originated in her fertile brain. Perhaps it would be as well merely to mention that the tenant had gone and we would enter our own house again, then send for some capable woman and have it thoroughly cleaned.

I set about this latter the next morning. Bridget O'Neale and her son Tim came. Carpets were taken up and beaten, paint and windows cleaned, bedding washed, and the range and bath being out of order, the plumbers paid us a visit.

Right in the midst of this Ned came rushing up to the house and glanced around dismayed. A few words explained the situation.

"It is an atrocious piece of work!" said Ned, indignantly. "And they paid only one month's rent! If that isn't about as cheeky a thing as I ever heard of! Why, old fellow, you'll be out on this speculation, and I am real sorry. However, I came about some other business. I had a note from uncle Nickey yesterday, in which he complained of having some rather queer symptoms, so I ran up last night and found he had been taken with paralysis, a very light stroke at first, but a second and severe one some ten hours later. He is just alive now, merely breathes, and lies like a log. The shock prostrated aunt Jane, and the doctor thinks her condition critical. I telegraphed to Kitty, and staid all night, and now I am going up for her. There is an excellent housekeeper, and the neighbors are very kind, but



I know Kitty would be willing to leave everything and come. Poor old people ! And yet, they have had a happy life together, and both have exceeded the three score and ten years."

"I will meet you on the train and go up—that is, if I shall not be in the way," I remarked.

"Oh, no. Aunt Jane asked if you were in town. We shall try to get the four-twenty train. Sim will be there with the wagon. Good-bye till then, for I have my hands full."

I went up with them. Poor uncle Nick was still alive, but breathed his last at midnight. The physician thought the sad tidings had better be kept from aunt Jane. I wrote to the Waltons, and to Elizabeth, mentioning that the house would be ready by Saturday if she chose to come up, and received a telegram that she would.

I paid Bridget and Tim on Saturday noon, and settled the plumber's bill. The real profit I had made on my tenant had been a trifle over one hundred dollars. These two bills and the numerous replacements cost me forty-seven ; but the grease had been extracted from the carpet, and the house had a snug, tidy look. It would be the better part of wisdom not to inform Elizabeth of these little contretemps. I own I looked at the experiment rather ruefully, and began to have some misgivings on the point of my ability to economize. I had paid the five hundred so triumphantly on my mortgage,



trusting the first of August to be materially assisted in paying my quarter's rent, and behold ! it was minus instead of plus. Pleading extra expenses, I had anticipated my income, and would be no more than straight by next quarter day. Where then would five hundred dollars come from to pay my own rent ? Must I have recourse to borrowing again ?

Elizabeth felt somewhat disappointed at first at the turn affairs had taken, for she had been counting on a pleasant winter at a hotel. We discussed the Whittlesey defection on Saturday night, and on Sunday she began the day with discoveries. Dishes were broken and missing, sheets and table linen had disappeared—we had only left our second best. Our pretty Swiss clock was a ruin, and several other things that had escaped my notice. What she would have said if she had seen the house a week earlier I could dimly guess, and I felicitated myself on my extraordinary foresight and prudence.

On Monday uncle Nicholas Berrian was buried in an old-fashioned graveyard with his ancestors. Aunt Jane was so poorly that they thought it best to delay explanations still a little longer. Elizabeth was kindly sympathetic. It eased up matters a little, I thought, as it made a break in her rigid household inspection.

“I do not believe you made a penny by that foolish experiment, Adolphus,” she said, a week or two later. “What do men understand about economy ? They



save at one end and spend at the other. It is fortunate nothing worse happened, though. I wouldn't have taken a good deal for that vase, and the cuspidor, and I know those people carried off two bronzes, and that verde-antique urn. But I hope you *are* satisfied. I went to that miserable Mount Nebo to please you, slept on a bed like a rock, and suffered all manner of deprivations, just to enable you to pay a few paltry debts. I hope they are paid, and I shall hear no more about them."

"They are *not* paid," I answered, rather crestfallen.

"Then I warn you," and Elizabeth held out her hand with an imposing gesture, she had raised her head to its proudest height—"then I warn you, Adolphus, that you must pay them yourself. I will not be dragged around from post to pillar, from one cheap boarding-house to another, the wife of a man doing a good business, the mother of an infant child; I will not scrimp, and pinch, and go without everything. Why, I might as well have married a—a—a day laborer, or some wretched poetical youth without a penny. I have been grossly deceived in you, Adolphus, and what is to be the end of my miserable life I know not. Any woman of spirit would sue for a divorce, yes, she would," and here my wife broke down in a hysterical sob.

I soothed and comforted. I even offered her the new navy blue silk dress she desired, though how it was to be paid for I scarcely knew. And Elizabeth kissed me



in token of forgiveness, when I promised I would annoy her no more with mention of these unlucky debts.

We had a new domestic in the kitchen, a pretty, cheerful young Irish girl, who was a tolerable cook. I took Miss Muldoon into counsel, and informed her that I desired to be as economical as possible this winter, and that she should not be the loser by keeping a strict oversight on the kitchen department.

But how was I to get out of debt? I had made only one hundred dollars real advance the past six months. Two hundred a year would take me eight years to become a free man. Could I *live* under this continuous burthen? No! I would not. Next year I would arise in all the dignity and majesty of head of the family, and retire to a French flat at one thousand per year, keep but one servant, and, if Elizabeth considered it fit grounds for divorce—it would be terrible indeed, and a shiver ran through my vitals.

“Here is a note, just brought by a messenger,” said Elizabeth, breaking in upon my bitter reflections.

I opened it slowly. A brief note from my uncle’s lawyer. Aunt Jane had died at noon, and would be buried on Thursday. The will would be read after the funeral, and, as I was interested, would I surely be present, and could I favor him with the address of Mrs. Walton, as he wished to notify her.

I read in silence. Like a picture the old country one and a half story cottage rose before me. The best room,



with a quaint old ingrain carpet, an antique carved bureau, a horsehair sofa, studded with brass-headed nails, and some rush-bottomed chairs, brass candlesticks and andirons, just as they had been when I was a little boy. The off-room, as they called it, like the parlor, with rag carpet and high-post bedstead, a sort of spare chamber, a kitchen, with painted floor and braided rag rugs, a bedroom adjoining, where uncle Nicholas had died, and two chambers above. Roomy, comfortable and neat, but very plain and simple. The farm had been sold off by degrees, so that only a few acres remained. It was a wickedly mercenary thought, and I blushed over it, still it did come into my mind. There were just three heirs. If there *could* be realized six thousand dollars—two thousand dollars apiece—I would ask no more of fate. I should be so unutterably happy that I should never cease to bless these two kindly old people to my latest breath.

“That letter is from a woman, I know, Adolphus,” said my wife in a peculiar, deep, half-suppressed tone.

“A woman! Read it yourself. Aunt Jane is dead, and it is from uncle’s lawyer, Mr. Kendrick,” and I handed it to her.

“But why should you turn so red over it?”

“Did I turn red?” I asked, innocently.

“Poor old people! So they are both gone, Adolphus. If the things are divided I should like to have those brass candlesticks and andirons in the parlor (those



things are all coming round again) and that delightfully quaint old bureau, and a spider-legged, inlaid table, and oh ! there must be lots of curiosities in the house. I do not suppose they left much money, but some of those old articles I should appreciate so highly."

"I will speak about them," I returned. Surely I could not accuse Elizabeth of sordid impulses.

We went to the funeral. It was at two o'clock on a cloudy, raw October day. We returned in a rather chilly state of feeling, but there was a cosy fire in the wide kitchen, that seemed to diffuse an agreeable warmth all through.

Mr. Kendrick brought out the will. Knowing its contents beforehand, and feeling certain that Mrs. Berrian could not long survive, he had thought it as well to defer the reading until now.

There was the usual legal preamble. Everything was to remain in the present condition as long as his dear wife, Jane Berrian, lived, rents and income to be at her sole use and disposal, and at her death—

We listened in amazement. Did I hear aright ?

"Three houses in a handsome brick row in Fifty-fourth street, one to my dear nephew, Edward Bromley, one to my dear nephew, Adolphus Stryker, one to my niece, Emmeline Walton. My farm, with the old house at Kingsbridge, to be sold to my neighbor, David Willis, and the money divided equally between the three heirs. The furniture to be divided in like manner."



I seemed to be struck speechless the first moment. A house of my very own ! And oh ! this load of debt lifted from my shoulders !

“ Why, how strange ! ” cried Ned. “ I did not dream of such a thing. Did you, Adolphus ? ”

I shook my head.

“ Mr. Berrian took a mortgage on the property fully thirty years ago,” explained Mr. Kendrick. “ In time he became sole owner. Then it was built upon, and he took two of the houses, releasing the property from all incumbrance. Afterward he bought the third. They are all clear, in good repair, and first-class houses in every respect. There is a little money in the bank, sufficient to pay all expenses and the few legacies. Mr. Willis has offered six thousand dollars for this place. Are you willing, as heirs, to take that ? Mr. Berrian considered it a fair price.”

We all certified our assent. Never were there more surprised or happier heirs. We remained all night, and talked over old times, when, as boys, Ned and I had spent our school vacations here, fished and crabbed, and learned to swim in the Harlem river yonder. I went to bed in a seraphic state of mind, though I strove hard to conceal my internal transports, and assume a seemly gravity. And I must do Elizabeth the justice to say that she was not unduly elated, even when Kitty and Mrs. Walton agreed that she should have the articles on which her heart was irrevocably set. The house ap-



peared to her a secondary consideration. I suppose she thought we would always have a house, but antiques two or three hundred years old were above price.

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### CHAPTER XIII.

ON our return to the city we went to look at our house —houses, I should say, and found that Mr. Kendrick had not over praised. They were renting for eighteen hundred dollars, though they had formerly gone at a much higher figure, and were superior in every way to the one in which we were living. Elizabeth was very gracious and serene, while I could hardly contain myself, but then she had not been encompassed with the shadow of debt for years.

The place was sold immediately, and the money paid over. I gave Elizabeth a handsome black velvet dress and some emeralds, and paid my debts. I was a free man! I owned my furniture, I owned my life policy, and henceforward no debt of any kind should be admitted or smuggled into my house. I had had enough of it!

But wonders had just begun. On Mr. Keep's return, the last of October, we were called into consultation. Mr. Trask had resolved to retire from the business. I was to take an equal partnership, and we were to admit



Harry Van Duyne, in whom Mr. Trask had taken a warm interest ; indeed, he was a distant connection. I was delighted for little Dora's sake, and the new agreement was to go into effect on the first of January. I should have a larger income if no misfortunes befell us, but much more responsibility in trying times. Still, I did not feel inclined to regret any of these unlooked for incidents.

I must mention that about this time, a person in Baltimore wrote to inquire about my whilom tenant, Mr. Whittlesey. He had been using my name as a passport, and claiming an intimate friendship. I hope I am not generally vindictive, but I took great delight in settling the scoundrel and unmasking his swindling propensities.

To Elizabeth's great surprise, her friend Stacy Germain accepted a rich young Californian, a self-made man, guiltless of the slightest artistic proclivities—a good, plain, jolly, sensible fellow, who was desperately in love, and ready to shower everything in his possession upon his betrothed. I thought it a sensible marriage, but Elizabeth sighed and quoted Lockesley Hall, and wondered how it came that men were so dull and stupid, and could not see ! If Van Bricklebach had only—

“My dear,” I replied sagaciously, “I can't imagine that half-sentimental, fussy, hyper-critical old thing who goes into ecstasies over a broken bit of china, and sees no merit in fresh, clean, wholesome articles or virtues, being the husband of any woman. Miss Germain has



chosen sensibly. And now," I went on in overwhelming good nature, "I suppose you will want to make her a handsome wedding present. She did not send us anything, but no doubt she would have, if she had known us at that period."

"Well—yes," said Elizabeth, with a touch of plain-tiveness that she now and then affected.

"There is a check," returned I, writing out one for a hundred dollars.

"Thank you, Adolphus," my wife replied with unwonted meekness.

Having come to fair sailing with a reasonable degree of prosperity before me, I thought to bid the public adieu without any more of those marital interchanges of differences of opinion. We had laid our plan to move in the spring into our own house. I had resolved to take out a new life insurance policy for five thousand dollars, to be settled upon Elizabeth. Our son was thriving—a very prodigy, *we* thought, and really, it seemed as if no storm could hereafter disturb the even tenor of our way. I felt now that I could enjoy life, and when of an evening I stretched my slippered feet toward the cheerful grate fire, I fell into a beatific state of repose, and envied no one.

It was the 12th of November. The day had been dull, cold and rainy by turns, and now closed in with a most uncomfortable sleet. I entered the house to find it warm and cheerful, a heliotrope standing on a bracket in the hall



perfuming the air ; Elizabeth, in a pretty attire of silk and cashmere and soft laces ; my son in white, with a brown sash and brown legs, his lovely golden hair in dainty rings—it was not red, as I had at one time feared it would be ; the dinner inviting to a hungry man, and neatly served. Afterward we went up to the library, where I generally frolicked with master Laurie, and rode him on my foot until Rose came to take him to bed.

Then I picked up my paper, and stretched out my limbs. It might not have been elegant, but it was comfortable.

“Dolly Norwood was in this morning, Adolphus. It was so funny !” and Elizabeth laughed triumphantly. “I could not imagine at first what the drift of her apparently careless questioning might be, but suddenly it flashed over me. I kept just as grave as a judge—I suppose they are grave—and asked little bits of things until I found out every particle of the plan. And, what *do* you think, Adolphus ?”

My wife’s face was a study, and yet it gave a clue to some great pleasure or delight.

“I’m not very good at guessing. May be the Norwoods have had a house left to them.”

“Stupid !” and Elizabeth laughed good humoredly. “Do you remember what day the 16th will be ?”

“Why—Tuesday !” I answered promptly.

“Tuesday !” she re-echoed a little vexed. “You might at least have—”



"Why, it is the anniversary of our wedding day," and I looked up with a smile, thinking that Elizabeth appeared younger and handsomer than when I married her.

"Yes, and the fifth at that. Why, it seems only the other day. I do wonder if you will be rich enough to go to Europe next year?"

I made a grimace, remembering the horrid sea-sickness and headaches.

"What was I saying—oh, it's the fifth, and there is such a surprise in store. I ought not tell it, but when I found it out all myself—and you must carry it off as if you had never heard a word. *I shall be just splendid!*"

"But what is it all?" I asked, curiously.

"A surprise, Adolphus, dear. A sort of impromptu wedding party," and she glanced up with her most bewitching grace.

"You mean to give a party?" I went on, bewildered.

"Give one? No indeed! *We* are to receive one. It is to be a wooden wedding, because we have been married just five years."

"I have heard of silver weddings, and golden weddings, but—wooden—"

"Oh, there are a great many pretty wooden articles," said she, in a graciously explanatory manner. "There are brackets, and picture frames, and vases—beautifully carved ones—and I *would* like a new Swiss clock, for



those Whittlesey imps ruined ours, and—well, chairs, and everything that is made mostly of wood.”

“And Mrs. Norwood proposes to get up such a surprise party for us,” I said, the light breaking slowly in upon my brain.

“Yes. I know that is just it. It is so delightful to keep these anniversaries, and have something for a memory of them.”

“Our friends and neighbors mean to bestow upon us sundry and divers gifts in wooden ware—do I understand you aright, Elizabeth?”

“Well, you need not be so legal and solemn about it. Dolly made sure that we had no engagement for the evening, and then she proposed to come to tea.”

“Elizabeth,” I began, resolutely, “I have a word to say in this matter. I decline to have a wooden wedding. I will not be the recipient of any kind of wedding gifts ever again in my life, unless I lose my senses.”

“Adolphus!” she ejaculated, in the utmost amazement.

“I am in earnest.”

“Don’t be so silly. What signifies a few gifts, more or less? I am sure you may be glad to get something. Our wedding gifts have been stolen, and broken, and brought to an end generally.”

“Elizabeth,” said I, impressively, rising, to give my speech more force, and have greater freedom of gesture, “you see before you a man who, for the first time in



five years has broken the accursed bondage of debt. I do not owe any one a penny. I think, too, we have paid back our wedding gifts. Now, I am resolutely determined not to begin this thing over. Not so much as a single clothes-pin shall come into this house under pretence of a wooden wedding. To that atrocious and swindling system of gifts I owe many a wretched hour. I have borrowed money, I have raised it on security, yes, I have even been compelled to mortgage our furniture, and it was due to those same wedding presents. They led us to commence life wrongly. If they were not above our station, they certainly were above *my* means. We had to begin housekeeping on a grander scale. We had to hire a large house to take in our bedstead. We had to buy an expensive sideboard to display our silver, then we had to ask in visitors to look at it. There was the safe—”

“Are you crazy, Adolphus?”

“No, I have come to my senses. I *was* crazy when I consented to have a public wedding, with gifts on exhibition. I am done with that business forever.”

“Don’t make such a fool of yourself,” advised my wife, with scathing contempt. “Because we were once a few hundred dollars behindhand, and because we have made a few presents in return—”

“A few!” and I swelled myself to my utmost size.

“Don’t shriek so; I am not deaf! Yes, I say our presents *were* valuable. It would have cost you much



more to have bought even the half of them. You are the most ungrateful, unthankful—" and her voice trembled with passion.

"Madame, have you the slightest idea of their cost to me? See here," and I turned to my desk; "I have kept a memorandum of them. Let me read you a few figures: 'For packing and storing twice, for packing to move, and for safe to keep them in when they were at home, one hundred and eighty-two dollars; for the suite of furniture that I was compelled to pay for myself, five hundred and fifty dollars; for wedding presents in return, eighteen hundred dollars,' Elizabeth, making a total of over twenty-five hundred dollars! We could have bought our own silver and china, our own pictures and knick-knacks for that sum. We would not have needed a great house to be turned into a museum and cluttered up with useless articles. We could have begun life like sensible, rational human beings, and not idiotic copies of other idiotic creatures, and this is why I will have no wooden wedding, no silver wedding—"

"No silver wedding!" and she shrieked hysterically.

"No silver wedding; no more gifts of any kind, save those of pure, unadulterated friendship. No one shall be taxed to adorn or furnish my house, and I will not be taxed for that of another. It is contemptible beggary—a regular swindle—to lay every one you know under contribution."

"How will you prevent this?" asked Elizabeth, ral-



lying to the attack once more. "I do not know who are coming. *I* have asked no one for gifts."

"They shall not be admitted if they come laden with the treasures of California and Australia!" I exclaimed, majestically.

"Adolphus, I never knew until now how coarse, and unreasonable, and vituperative you could be, and what a furious temper you have! *I* have some rights," with a magnificent wave of the hand. "If I choose to admit my friends next Tuesday evening you will not—dare not—"

"I dare anything!" I cried, tragically. "Their gifts of wood shall perish in the range, a holocaust to common sense. I, for one, will break this miserable society bondage—this vulgar figment of generosity that expects a return of from two to fourfold."

"I never thought you were so mean and stingy and parsimonious! I didn't suppose you kept account of, and grudged every penny. When your own cousin Dora is married—"

"We can give her a kitten," I said; but my wife was too angry to laugh. Her eyes were like flame.

"Mind," I continued, "I am not condemning *all* presents. Interchanges of kindly affection are right and proper, pleasant to take and to give, but this ostentatious, selfish business, or this dragging gifts out of people who cannot afford it, is over for me. Hereafter we will give when it suits us, but to feel that you must be-



stow something upon the children and grandchildren of the woman who sent you a silver soup-ladle the day before you were married, is ridiculous ! ”

Elizabeth put her handkerchief to her eyes, and began to sob.

“ My dear,” I said, in a lower tone, “ I may have been a trifle too energetic in my protest—”

“ Will you take it back, Adolphus ? ”

“ Never ! never ! Come what will I stand on this rock of sound principle—of undying good sense ! ”

“ Then, Adolphus,” and she rose with crushing dignity, “ I feel that you have insulted me beyond redemption ! But for the fact that I am a mother, and that in law, a man has the right to his son, I believe I should take my child in my arms and breast this pitiless storm. I would never eat a meal, nor accept a penny at your hands. I would—yes, I would take a menial’s place. The charity of the cruel, mocking world would be sweet compared to favors from you ! But, though I am bound hand and foot, you cannot conquer my will nor my spirit ! I know what is due a woman ! ” With that she swept loftily from the room, and I was left alone. Conscious rectitude upheld me. I had the courage to face a possible fit of hysterics, and go for a doctor in this driving storm, but in my house there should be no wooden wedding.

There was a profound silence overhead. I read for awhile, I paced the floor softly, I smoked several cigars,



and at eleven proceeded to retire. The baby was asleep. Elizabeth had her face turned to the wall, and I did not disturb her.

I ate my breakfast alone the next morning. I took my dinner in solitary dignity. Sunday was passed in a state of blockade. Elizabeth was high and calm, and apparently resolved. What if she had settled upon some plan to circumvent me, to defy my authority? Tears and hysterics I could understand, but this quiet puzzled me.

I considered the subject well on Monday morning, and a bright thought entered my mind.

"Rose," I said, "will you get a few clothes and necessary articles together by two this afternoon. I am going to take you all down to Longport." And then I made a brief explanation. My cogent reasoning brought her over to my side. Then I asked Kate if she had any friend with whom she could spend a week, and she was quite willing to go to a cousin's.

Precisely at two I drove up in a hack. I told my wife then that we were to go to Longport, and that the house was to be shut up. There was a scene, of course. Elizabeth fainted. Rose packed, while Katie waited upon my wife. The baby was made ready, the trunk carried down, the doors and windows securely fastened. Then, wrapping Elizabeth in a waterproof, I took her in my arms.

"At least," she said, "you will allow me to put on a bonnet!"



Rose brought it.

With a firm and untrembling step Elizabeth walked down stairs. I assisted her into the carriage. Katie stood by with a parcel in her hand and a grin on her face. I went back and shut the night latch, and then we were off. No wooden wedding for us !

I had taken the precautions to telegraph to Mrs. Walton, and Dora was at the station with the family carriage. My wife greeted her coolly, and leaned back amid the cushions. I sat on the front seat, and unseen by curious eyes, wrote a few lines upon a card and passed it to Dora, who answered with a gleam of intelligence.

When we reached the house Elizabeth went straight to her room, and requested that her tea might be sent up. I explained that she had been a little ailing, but would probably be right in a few days. That evening the Waltons and I had a discussion on the whole business of wedding presents, and I was glad there were some honest souls who thought as I did on the matter.

"Adolphus," said Elizabeth, as I entered the room an hour or so later, "I wish to state that the breach between us is final ! There are some things that even *my* forgiving disposition cannot pardon. You have behaved in a ferocious and brutal manner, and my love for you has been cruelly crushed out of existence. For our child's sake I will take no public steps ; we will not bruit abroad our marital infelicity. We will go on together—if it suits you, but henceforward we live separate lives. I will endure my disappointment, my utter mistake in you as



best I may. I thought you a generous-minded, tender-hearted, considerate man. I believed I should be happier with you than any man I had ever met. You have proved sordid, tyrannical, utterly incapable of understanding a woman's heart. Perhaps—" with a sigh, "I ought not to blame you so severely when it is the fault of your nature, and when I find you no more capable of appreciation than a block of wood. I have forgiven many things, Adolphus, but this last insult is too much. Go, leave me! Explain the matter to your friends as you best may."

"Elizabeth, my dear—"

"I shall never be Elizabeth to you again, Mr. Stryker," she said, solemnly. "I am not to be coaxed, or cajoled, or bribed. Will you leave the room, or shall I?" and she rose majestically.

I tried to reason. I made abject apologies. I plead and coaxed, but in vain. Elizabeth was as emotionless as a statue. Finally I left her—there was no other course except having an open row in another person's house.

The next day was terrible, I must admit. I think I could have stood hysterics better. Elizabeth was icy calm, scornfully polite, and kept me at arm's length. When I retired the second night to my solitary couch, I almost wished I had let the wooden wedding take its own way. But it was too late. Did they come, I wondered, armed to the teeth, with their gifts? In spite of my misery I laughed.

We returned home on Friday, for I began to think I



could endure this kind of existence better in my own house. Elizabeth did not unbend an inch. Was this terrible state of affairs to last? Had I offended her past redemption?

I cast a look into the dismal future. Always, it appeared, I must be the victim, in some shape or other, of those wedding gifts. What wonder I anathematized them! And, finding the solitude unendurable, I resolved to spend my evenings writing this terrible warning to those of my sex about to commit matrimony. If I should save even one poor fellow from such a sad fate, I shall not have suffered in vain. I know I shall go down to my grave before my time, a sad wreck, a broken-hearted man, a martyr to principle evolved from a bitter and perplexing experience. I hope some kindly soul will give a sigh to my memory.

P. S.—Jubilate! I have made my peace with Elizabeth. I am again a happy man. The price is, refurnishing our house when we move, in the spring; giving my wife a new solid silver tea set, a velvet dress, and two new silks, and a new set of jewelry, and taking her to Saratoga next summer. I felt that it was a high price to pay, but, angel as she is, she agreed with me that, in the future, we would give nothing except from the purest friendship, have no eleemosynary weddings, nor charitable gatherings, that were to be returned fourfold.

We expect that our next door neighbors for the coming year will be Mr. and Mrs. Harry Van Duyne.

THE END.



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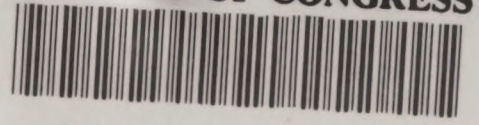


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